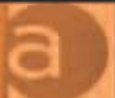


ANTHROPOLOGY AND CULTURAL HISTORY IN ASIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC



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Art and Society in the South Pacific



KATHERINE GIUFFRÉ

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Collective Creativity

Art and Society in the South Pacific

KATHERINE GIUFFRE
Colorado College, USA

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Series Editors' Preface

Art: Performance, Identity, and Ownership

Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart

Katherine Giuffre's detailed ethnographic study of a surge in artistic productions in Rarotonga provides an unusual and arresting picture of change in a Pacific Islands social milieu, tied in to globalization and history but exemplifying the perennially powerful capacities of the human imagination. Utilizing pointers from numbers of disciplines, including psychology and anthropology, Giuffre succeeds in analyzing and bringing to light the reasons for the remarkable efflorescence that she documents. On the anthropological side, we ourselves pointed her in the direction of John Liep's edited collection on creativity (Liep 2001) and Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency* (Gell 1998). To these could be added Hallam and Ingold's collection (2007), in which the editors point out that creativity should not be considered as an exceptional feature of social life, because it is at the heart of social life as such. "There is no script for social and cultural life. People have to work it out as they go along. In a word, they have to *improvise*" (Ingold and Hallam 2007, 1). By this yardstick, Lévi-Strauss's bricoleur would not be an exception but be the exemplar of *homo sapiens socialis*.

Ingold and Hallam foreground "improvisation" as basic, stressing its generative capacities. Expanding the concept, they refer to "the improvisational creativity of skilled practice" (2007, 14). Creativity for them is thus already present in improvisation. The cover of their book has an imprint of a pen drawing signed with "T.I. 2003." A series of continuous loops, links, lines, eyes, and faces appears to enclose reindeer and birds and other creatures, inchoate, humorous, insistent. Presumably, it is intended to illustrate artistically this basic idea of creative improvisation. Playfulness enters into this idea and gives it a performance dimension, displayed for us on the cover along with a reference to identity and then an iconic claim to ownership of the product. The drawing also resonates with the theme of "novelty as recombination ... found in the hybrid animal-human figures with which many medieval and early modern writings were illustrated" (p. 17). Hallam and Ingold's text comes close to Lévi-Strauss's famous representation of such hybrid figures in his *Pensée Sauvage* (Lévi-Strauss 1962), although they do not explicitly make this connection. Unexpected combinations, juxtapositions, transformations that tell us about fundamental possibilities: these are indeed among the bases of creative action in the world.

Yet there is a sense in which artistic creation, rooted as it may be in the negotiated and partial practices of “flow” in everyday life, also achieves itself by standing out from that background of fluid improvisation of forms and becoming a foreground that crystallizes into a new shape. It is in this context of “standing out” also that competition takes place and drives that differentiation of art forms which Dr. Giuffre has amply highlighted in her study. It is in competition that we find the individual and the collective elements of art brought together: drawing on shared collective resources artists vie with one another to produce works that will sell to tourists and collectors. This is the context that is delineated in the present book.

Such a context must also belong to a wider situation of cultural revival. Or it may itself constitute such a revival. In Taiwan, where we have conducted research for many years now,¹ indigenous Austronesian groups, long acculturated and brought under Han state control and cultural influences from both Chinese and Japanese sources, have, since 1986 and with official support, sought to reassert their original and historical identities, appealing to cultural motifs in order to do so. They have revived cultural practices, changing them very often to adapt them to the interests of tourists, especially Han tourists. They put on dances in cultural centers that re-enact or rely on cultural practices such as initiation, war, or harvest dances (see, e.g., Stewart and Strathern 2005, Strathern and Stewart 2005, 2007). In Papua New Guinea, another of our research areas, art was made central to the national project from the time of political independence from Australia in 1975 onwards. This was done through legislation that set up a series of cultural institutions, including a national Museum, the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, a national theater, and the national Arts School, all supported by an appropriation of government money, assisted by the Australian government of the day. The Arts School became the natural center from which new artists could emerge, and it was later incorporated into the University of Papua New Guinea, whose campus was nearby in Waigani, Port Moresby. Another factor, however, came into play: the presence of two expatriates, a non-New Guinean artist, Georgina Beier, and her husband, Prof. Ulli Beier, who was the founding Director of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies and an entrepreneur who helped to sponsor both new writers of literature and producers of the visual arts. Georgina Beier taught various artistic techniques to a number of young aspiring artists, who later became among those who were very well known and well patronized. Such artists included, notably, Kauage, Jakupa, Akis, and Ruki Fane. These young male artists were not ones who had come up through the formal education system within New Guinea. Kauage, for example, spoke his indigenous Chimbu (Simbu) language and the lingua franca, Tok Pisin. He was not educated in

1 A. Strathern and P.J. Stewart (Strathern) are a husband and wife research team who have spent many years as long-term researchers working on a variety of topics in a number of different geographical locales, including Papua New Guinea and Taiwan. They have published extensively and widely. For a list of relevant examples of their work visit their website (www.pitt.edu/~strather/sandspublicat.htm).

other languages, e.g., English. Georgina Beier introduced to him various painting techniques and encouraged him to develop these in his own way. Kauage's works eventually became quite famous and have been exhibited internationally. Artists also took advantage of schemes that encouraged artists and sculptors, painters, music-players, song makers, weavers, or bead and jewellery crafters, to re-develop images and themes from the past. In one of the cases that we know well from work in Taiwan among the Paiwan people in the southern part of the Island, the framework that surrounds such initiatives consists of (a) government support, (b) community approval and organization, and (c) individual and familial creativity. Artistic production is set into a narrative of historical change, from government disapproval and suppression of indigenous customs at large to government support and community enthusiasm. Art is also expressed in church decorations that depict Christian figures and symbols with images in Paiwan style (Stewart and Strathern 2007a, 2007b, 282; Strathern and Stewart 2009; Tan 2001). Most of the art objects produced are either not for commercial purposes, as with church sculptures, or are for consumption in the tourist network within Taiwan itself. There seems to be a contrast here with Giuffrè's study of Rarotonga, where the colonial and post-colonial connections with New Zealand have provided chances of art education, for example at the University of Auckland, and opportunities to sell to a market. Taiwan, by comparison, has been enclaved by its separation from, and contested relationship with, Mainland China, and within Taiwan itself, the fourteen currently recognized "tribes" (including the Paiwan) are further enclaved as a tiny minority within a largely Han majority population of Taiwanese and Mainlander immigrants. Nevertheless, the comparison, and contrast, with Rarotonga is quite instructive. The Rarotongans are a small population, but they are not a minority within their own land; and their external ties with New Zealand are founded not only on a colonial relationship of the past but on their older ethnic homogeneity with the Maori of New Zealand. So much easier for them, then, to make use of these connections to open up pathways for their artistic work.

Dr. Giuffrè notes that in Rarotonga cultural revival began, in some ways, with the return home of youths who came back from New Zealand, bringing with them notions about indigeneity and its putative rights deriving from the New Zealand Maori context. As has happened also with the indigenous groups in Taiwan, people began to adopt or re-insert indigenous elements into their names. In New Zealand itself, Giuffrè notes, programs have been instituted to teach the Cook Islands Maori language. Similarly in Taiwan, cultural revival has gone hand in hand with efforts to recover and re-institute the teaching of indigenous languages to the younger generations (Strathern and Stewart 2005). In passing, Dr. Giuffrè also notes that there has been a renewal of interest in tattoos (and tattooing is a highly salient historical practice among Polynesian groups).

There is another parallel from our Taiwanese research, this time with the group called the Atayal, among whom tattooing was said to be originally important as a marker of warriorhood and the taking of heads of enemies. Indeed, it seems that without tattoos a person could not properly enter the afterworld on their death.

Japanese colonial authorities after 1895 forbade this practice of tattooing and forced those who wanted to be educated in school to have their tattoos removed; actions now remembered with indignation. More recently Atayal warriorhood has been transformed into dance displays, and versions of tattooing have been taken up again by some younger people who participate in these dances, often competing for prizes in festivals that may pit dancers of different “tribes” against one another.

It is probable that in many parts of the Pacific, art, song, dance, and drama have flourished as a result of festivals in which national and regional identities are show-cased and brought into the ambit of the independent nation as such. In these contexts individuals may exert great influence and help to bring artistic works into being. Interestingly enough, Kauage and others of the artists from Papua New Guinea that the Beiers worked with, came from Highlands areas of Papua New Guinea which did not have elaborate traditions of visual art and sculpture such as are found in many coastal parts of the country, notably the Sepik region. Their productions, however, drew notably on images found in songs and folktales in their local areas. The images they drew on and created were examples of what Kirsten Hastrup, in a discussion of “Agency, Anticipation, and Creativity,” refers to as “experience which is not captured by current categories and which potentially points to alternative ways of seeing things and acting on them.” (Hastrup 2007, 204)

Another important aspect of art production in Rarotonga and elsewhere is its connection with intellectual property rights. In contexts where art objects are produced not for internal ritual purposes or for recreation but for external sale, such issues of rights are likely to arise. Giuffrè points out that the individualistic element in the intellectual property rights context conflicts with Rarotongan concepts of generosity and sharing. Identity questions, however, run across this conflict. “Who owns native culture?,” is the question posed in the title of a book on this matter by Michael Brown (Brown 2004). “Who can say?” is the question that might be offered in response to this question. In Rarotonga the issue has turned on who has the right to use cultural materials and images from Rarotonga itself. But disputes arise primarily, if not exclusively, in contexts of monetary profit. Giuffrè cites the case of a painting of a senior local woman standing near a clothesline. The painting was done from a photograph of the woman taken by the artist, who was an expatriate and also ran a gallery. The Cook Islands National Visual Arts Society instigated a copyright lawsuit against the artist on grounds that art galleries should be reserved for Cook Islanders and that foreigners should not be allowed to use Rarotongan cultural symbols. The lawsuit was clearly a part of indigenous rights political movements in New Zealand and elsewhere. The artist eventually closed her gallery and went back to New Zealand.

Elizabeth Burns Coleman has made an in-depth examination of comparable issues in the indigenous Australian context (Coleman 2005). She notes (p. 31) that according to some viewpoints, claims to the exclusive ownership of culture may be devalued if they are linked to “ethnic nationalism.” She notes further that cultural

elements, especially as they enter art or a political movement, are examples of the “creation of tradition” (p. 35). She concludes that “a group making a claim over a cultural form on the basis that it is a part of their identity needs to be able to explain the relationship between that form and their identity” (p. 42). She goes on in her book to suggest that in the case of the indigenous Australian art forms she discusses their motifs can be seen as “insignia” of the artists’ groups, and therefore there is a legitimate basis for making a claim of ownership. In the Rarotongan case, comparable motifs certainly exist, but their exclusive relationship to specific groups may not be clear. Less clear again is the status of an image derived from a photograph that happens to include cultural elements, such as a kind of cloth. But aside from the question of group claims there is the sense of personal creativity and its claims to recognition. In a case we ourselves have studied and written about from Papua New Guinea a young woman contested the appropriation, without suitable reward or acknowledgement, of her design, done as a schoolgirl, for what became the country’s national flag (Strathern and Stewart 2000). She said that the flag, i.e., its design, was hers, and she did not want it used as it had been (“mi les long yupela usim flag bilong mi” in the Tok Pisin lingua franca she used to express this point). Here she was speaking as an artist. Creativity may in the long run be its own reward (like virtue is said to be). But artists, like everyone else, wish to be individually recognized for what they have achieved.

In this book Dr. Giuffrè has given us a unique and vivid picture of creativity in transition in a Pacific Island context that must resonate with other such cases around the world. We recognize here her achievement in doing so.

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This book is dedicated to my father.

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Chapter 1

Networks and Creativity

Creativity happens at many levels: at the level of the culture, at the level of the subculture, at the level of the group, and at the level of the individual. At each of these levels, it is the social dynamic of lived relationships within structures that plays a key role in facilitating (or inhibiting) creativity. This is a study of creativity as a *social* phenomenon which will examine both large-scale social pressures and opportunities and also creative individuals, especially as they are embedded in social relationships that can enhance or constrict creativity.

Networks of relationships are important. Networks have particular shapes and characteristics, such as hierarchy or density, for example. And individuals, of course, occupy particular positions within those networks—at the margins, say, or as the bridge between two cliques. Although we often think of creativity as an individual attribute that a person possesses to a greater or lesser degree, I will argue here that creativity is very much a social phenomenon and that creativity is in many ways produced by particular types of social structures. Moreover, particular positions and roles within those structures are necessary for creativity to flourish. Creative individuals are embedded within specific network contexts so that creativity itself, rather than being an individual personality characteristic is, instead, a collective phenomenon.

In order to explore creativity as a *social* phenomenon, it is necessary to have a base in a society—a society largely self-contained, with a high degree of ongoing creative action, and small enough to thoroughly covered. The small island of Rarotonga provides an excellent case study. Culture—both with a capital “C” and with a lowercase one—is vigorously alive, growing and changing, on Rarotonga, the capital of the Cook Islands, a string of 15 tropical islands in central Polynesia. The Cooks have been swept by tumultuous changes during the past 200 years, beginning with the arrival of the first Europeans—which resulted in the decimation of the population—and continuing through to the present profound economic changes based on the explosive growth of tourism and the expanding export market for black pearls. Yet through all of this upheaval, certain aspects of Cook Islands Maori culture have proven extraordinarily tenacious, such as the central place of the ethos of generosity in daily life and the continuing importance of “mana” (moral honor) to the status hierarchy. The tensions between coping with these (and many other) changes while preserving continuity with a rich cultural heritage have, in the past few years, shaped a rapidly expanding world on Rarotonga. Looking closely at that art world, in turn, can provide key insights into critical issues regarding culture wars, identity politics, indigenous rights, and post-industrial economics.

The Rarotongan Arts Explosion

“A sleeping giant woke up this year,” wrote journalist Charles Pitt (28 December 2002, 17) in the *Cook Islands Herald* at the end of 2002. “That giant was the ‘collective creativity’ of a growing band of local artists not only more confident in their ability, but also more unified in purpose, more positive and assured in outlook and with a stronger, clearer vision of the future. ... I suppose that it would be fair to say that in 2002, local art came of age. It was a year of numerous highlights.” Writing that glowing paragraph, Pitt was looking out on an art world that included more fine art galleries per capita than New York City, Paris, or London, art ranging from the most traditional Polynesian carvings through European-style drawing and painting to postmodern multimedia installations, the beginnings of serious attention from the international fine arts world, and a “growing band of local artists” who were making it all happen. Intriguing questions beg to be answered about the awakening of this “sleeping giant:” why and how? Why did this place at this time experience such a surge of artistic production? And how did this art world come to be built?

Crocombe (2001, 193–4) alludes to both economic and political theories as an explanation:

The prominence given to culture here in the 1990s is probably the highest in the region. The government established a ministry of culture with a higher proportion of government money and staff than any ‘rich’ country would consider it could afford. The island of Rarotonga, with only 10,000 people, has competitions for traditional dancing, traditional and modern singing, composing, drumming, guitar and ukulele playing, dress, floral arrangements, making *tivaevae*, weaving and other handicrafts, talent quests for young women, a ‘queen’ contest for gay men, culinary arts and a range of other forms of expression. All these came into being since the international airport opened in 1974. The main prizes are provided by the airlines and others in the travel industry.

The primary motive for government participation, however, was political. Overtly it saw the stimulation of the creative arts as contributing to nation-building and confidence-building (as described by Sissons 1997, 1999), both of which it undoubtedly was. Covertly, however, the motivation seems to have been party politics. [Funding for culture was used by competing political parties to shore up voter loyalty.] ... The economic collapse of the mid-1990s, however, made the government reduce its participation in cultural activity greatly. Now creative expression is initiated more by entrepreneurs and funded by commerce.

Chappell (2003, 48–51) writing in *Art News New Zealand*, also sees the importance of the larger social context:

So why do the Cooks seemingly produce more artists per capita than their more populous neighbors? ... [W]hat does the future hold for those artists who choose to base themselves in Rarotonga? Can this tiny country support a burgeoning art scene? ... [I]t now seems Rarotonga has a sizeable critical mass of local artists to support a healthy art scene, and because it remains a safe tourist destination, visitor numbers are set to climb steadily. With its rich local and New Zealand-based expatriate talent, the future bodes well for this quiet achiever in the Pacific art world.

To explain “why” and “how” a place becomes a locus of artistic creativity, it is important to look at not only individual artists, but also larger social systems that allow and encourage their development. In trying to understand the mechanisms that motivate and enhance creativity, social scientists are in the midst of a debate between individual level and socio-cultural level explanations. The main argument in this book is that social structures—especially certain shapes of social networks—are important determinants of the rise of artistic creativity on Rarotonga. This contention is at odds, to say the least, with the ways in which most people tend to think about creativity.

Theories of Creativity

Traditional conceptions of creativity locate the “muse” somewhere in the interior psyche of special individuals who, locked in their garrets, write their sonnets or paint their pictures. Among researchers into the question of the sources of creativity, some psychologists begin by positing creativity as an artifact of mental imbalance Sandblom (1999, 36), for example, writes:

The first question is whether artists are at all to be counted among the mentally normal, a question half answered by the saying, ‘there is no cure for genius’. Aberrant psychic traits which in ordinary people would seem morbid may add to the originality and infatuation of artistic creation; they may even constitute its basis or origin. ... The proportion of creators with such a borderline mental constitution has been put as high as 80 per cent. Insanity has at times been regarded as a special asset to the creative mind.

He further goes on to say (1999, 68, emphasis added) that “The neuroses and psychosomatic disorders are of special interest to us as they strongly influence or may even *constitute the foundation of artistic creation*.” Based on after-the-fact diagnoses of mental illness among artists (most of whom are long dead), Sandblom’s analysis is heavily weighted towards extreme individualism in theorizing the sources of creativity. Sandblom admits that he has done no systematic gathering of data and, in fact, he omits from his analysis those artists who did not exhibit symptoms that he could classify as mental illness, as well as any living artists who

might contradict his assessments. Sandblom's work does, however, show that if one has a presupposition that creativity is the result of mental illness, it is easy to find examples to back up that initial assumption.

Although Sandblom may be at one extreme in the spectrum of creativity research by viewing "neuroses and psychosomatic disorders" as the possible source of creativity, his conjectures fit very well with those of the founder of his discipline. As Csikszentmihaly (1996, 100) notes:

According to Freud, the curiosity at the roots of the creative process—especially in the arts—is triggered by a childhood experience of sexual origin, a memory so devastating that it had to be repressed. ... The artist's zeal in trying to find new forms of representation ... [is] really disguised attempts to understand the confusing impressions the child felt when witnessing his parents having sex, or the ambivalently erotic emotions toward one of the parents.

Freud's theory falls flat in its lack of explanatory power, certainly, although it struck a chord among early twentieth century thinkers steeped in the Romantic ideals of artists as lonely and tortured geniuses driven by subconscious erotic impulses beyond their understanding or control. The stereotype promulgated by Freud's idea continued to have force well into the twentieth century (and even further). One need only remember the conflicted, highly sexualized depiction of Michelangelo put forward in the tellingly named popular novel and film *The Agony and the Ecstasy*.

Some researchers, however, put the source of creativity not with mental illness, but merely with special brain functions that may be biologically selected. "Perhaps the first trait that facilitates creativity," according to Csikszentmihaly (1996, 52, emphasis in original), "is a *genetic predisposition* for a given domain. It makes sense that a person whose nervous system is more sensitive to color and light will have an advantage in becoming a painter, while someone born with a perfect pitch will do well in music." Although there is an important distinction to be made between a theory that "makes sense" and a theory that is true, Csikszentmihaly explains how evolution plays a role in this process using a similar type of reasoning (1996, 109):

By random mutations some individuals must have developed a nervous system in which the discovery of novelty stimulates the pleasure centers of the brain. Just as some individuals derive a keener pleasure from sex and others from food, so some must have been born who derived a keener pleasure from learning something new.

For the moment, we have no way of testing Csikszentmihaly's theories. Although he claims that they "must" be true, Csikszentmihaly can only speculate.

Other psychologists place the sources of creativity neither with evolutionary wiring nor with mental illness or trauma, but instead with the restoration of mental health. For example, Gedo (1990, 37) argues that:

... the resolution of certain severe intrapsychic conflicts may unleash a great creative talent previously stymied by guilt or anxiety about the fruitful exercise of such powers. To be specific about the case of the patient I am describing, she could not become an acclaimed artist as long as she was afraid that such success on her part would so overwhelm her intimates that it would condemn her to solitude—a conviction she had gained as a result of innumerable painful experiences within her family of origin.

Although Gedo presents a specific case to buttress his argument, his use of the phrase “acclaimed artist” is worth noting. Acclaim, as many of the researchers discussed below will note, is generated not by the artist, no matter what her mental state, but by the social world outside of the artist. Legions of aspiring artists have failed to achieve acclaim despite passionately wholehearted pursuit of it. Acclaim is not in the power of the artist to bestow on her own work. Like Csikszentmihaly’s use of “do well” in the passage on above, Gedo here is trying to negotiate the extremely tricky terrain between “creativity” and the recognition of such. This line of thought begins to open up at least one of the social dimensions of creativity: how, in fact, can we tell creativity without reference to the social world against which creativity posits itself? As White (1993, 187) notes, “Creativity is inescapably social by its main criterion that others not have uttered such an artwork before.”

In an attempt to determine specifically what makes the creative individual create, some psychologists have looked very closely at those acknowledged as being creative (again facing of the problem of disentangling the “creative” from the “acclaimed as creative”) in an attempt to find their distinguishing characteristics. In interviewing almost a hundred highly successful *a priori* defined “creative” people in many fields about their backgrounds, habits, ideas, and attitudes, Csikszentmihaly (1996, 10) finds, as an example of the characteristics that separate the creative individual from the rest of us, that, “In fact, creative people are neither single-minded, specialized, nor selfish. Indeed, they seem to be the opposite: they love to make connections with adjacent areas of knowledge. They tend to be—in principle—caring and sensitive.” Ng (2001, 293), however, in his study of 344 university students in Singapore and Australia found, as his title states so succinctly, that “Creators are dogmatic people, ‘nice’ people are not creative, and creative people are not ‘nice’.” To add to the confusion on this point, Albert (1990, 23, emphasis in original) takes a third tack and argues that:

The eminent seem to protect themselves from distractions and intrusions that social and work involvement, and, for many, intimacy, may bring into their life work by psychologically *distancing* themselves. This is not the same as a schizoid or repressive personality; it is a style of coping that is remarkable selective and

allows the individual to work alone, an important ability that characterizes many highly creative persons.

This is only one example, but in looking for personality characteristics that correlate with creativity, the mass of psychological research seems inconclusive, at best. In fact, Csikszentmihaly finds a whole laundry list of creative characteristics with regard to which, however, the creative people that he interviewed varied wildly. As one example of this, he notes that “Creative people seem to harbor opposite tendencies on the continuum between extroversion and introversion.” (1996, 65) He also notes that creative people are both responsible and irresponsible, rebellious and traditionalist, energetic and quiet and restful, and so on. Yet, despite the difficulties in finding individual psychological characteristics that could account for creativity, many psychologists argue that the individual level analysis is the course of inquiry to pursue. “While not wishing to minimize the influence of social and historical processes,” Albert (1990, 19) writes,

one needs to remember that, regardless of when, where, or how eminence is achieved, it is achieved through the decisions, efforts, and long-term performances of an individual—without whom there would simply be nothing to concern ourselves with, to observe, to respond to, to note, to count, and to evaluate in any place or at any time.

The social world of opportunity and constraint, even of defining or recognizing the “creative,” is banished from consideration.

With the advent of neuroscience into their domain, one branch of psychology can turn once again to the workings of the brain without having to rely on the Freudian catch-all of childhood sexuality. Gedo (1990, 35) optimistically writes: “I am tempted to define *creativity* ... as the healthy enjoyment of the search for novelty. The neurophysiologists tell us that the propensity for such exploration is actually wired into the brain.” The actual biological source of creativity, however, continues to elude the neurophysiologists.

Another group of researchers, however, has begun to look at the way that social components play a role in the development of creativity by, for instance, putting individuals into the right social climate to foster creativity. Csikszentmihaly (1996, 8–9) notes that:

... [C]enters of creativity ... tended to be places where wealth allowed individuals to learn and to experiment above and beyond what was necessary for survival. It also seems true that centers of creativity tended to be at the intersection of different cultures, where beliefs, lifestyles, and knowledge mingle and allow individuals to see new combinations of ideas with greater ease.

The anthropological literature backs up this point with an abundance of studies of instances of cultural creativity in response to the challenges brought about by the

transition to modernity. In his thoughtful and compendious anthology, *Locating Cultural Creativity* (2001), John Liep has gathered together a series of insightful essays discussing the creative process in a variety of settings and from a variety of different viewpoints. As Liep himself (2001, 6–7) notes,

The production of cultural forms is not the creation of something out of nothing. Every creative effort must emanate from familiar forms and methods of production. ... The immediate background is always the experience of those concerned ... [and] when conventional understandings are discredited or no longer able to explain altered conditions, the need for creating new cultural schemes to account for life in the world becomes acutely urgent.

Liep goes on to argue that, “It would also seem that the potential for the most striking and novel forms would involve the crossing of the largest cultural distance, if this could be measured.” (2001, 7)

Moreover, the limits of creativity are also socially determined. Borofsky (2001, 68) argues that, “Creativity cannot be too radical if it is to be viewed as such. Otherwise, it is not seen—by others in the society—as creative; it is seen as something more akin to indecency, absurdity, or a violation of the law. Creativity, I am saying, constitutes an historically negotiated judgment. It is culturally defined, culturally framed.” That is, by its very nature, creativity has *at least* the social elements of recognition and understanding by an audience of others. The ways in which those others respond to the “creative” act or object is culturally determined. As Baxandall (1972) reminds us, the twenty-first century viewers of Renaissance frescoes are participating in a profoundly different experience from the fifteenth century audience for whom the frescoes were originally intended. Creators are inextricably linked to those for whom they create and, therefore, to specific circumstances of creation. Hastrup notes that, “Meaning cannot be private. Had the Argentinian tango-makers or the Indonesian poet not spoken within a conversational community, their inventive verses could have been discarded as irrelevant, maybe mad.” (2001, 38)

Moreover, even consumption can become “creative production” as the bricoleur refashions meanings in response to the pressures of modernity and postmodernity. Lofgren writes:

When consumption was redefined as ‘cultural production’ or ‘symbolic production’ ... [c]reativity became, in some ways, the weapon of the weak—a positive strategy of resistance. ... [C]ultural creativity ... is seen as enriching, elaborating, ‘thickening’ local lives, a process through which people make their everyday existence colourful, unique, specific, distinct and above all positive. It is also a concept mainly for the age of modernity (and postmodernity); there is sometimes a compensatory ring to it: being creative is how we cope with the vicissitudes of modernity. (Lofgren 2001, 73–7)

Lofgren reminds us that it is the creation of *meaning*, rather than the creation of *objects*, that is the central feature of creativity.

The creative individual is anchored in systems of meanings and must push the boundaries of traditional forms only within limits. Hastrup (2001, 40) writes, "... creativity is a process that takes place between 'gifted' individuals and their culture. The individual gift is wasted if it does not resonate with the community. To be creative is not merely to invent or to innovate but to make a new kind of understanding possible by revealing what is already partly sensed." Creativity is different from magic, she notes, in that creativity is brought forth from elements which already exist in the culture and the community, while magic conjures apparitions *ex nihilo*. The elements which come together in novel ways are already present in the culture. The symbols—and the meanings those symbols convey—are part of the larger community to whom the creator is speaking, the larger culture of which the creator is a part.

This understanding, of course, hearkens back to Lévi-Strauss's discussion of the bricoleur. (1966) The bricoleur makes innovative use of the materials at hand in reaction to unexpected circumstances in order to respond to the world in creative ways:

His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand', that is to say with a set of tools which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions. (1966, 17)

Bricoleurs, however, are never totally free to create as they wish; innovation is always at the mercy of cultural understanding. "The elements which the 'bricoleur' collects and uses are 'pre-constrained' like the constitutive units of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre ..." (1966, 19)

This combinatorial generativity, Friedman (2001, 59) notes, is of abiding interest to anthropologists. "Creativity in the structural sense," he writes,

can be understood as the improvisation of structural variation. It is structural insofar as it is intelligible to those who participate in the social world in question. Creativity is only recognized in terms of its constraints. It is the latter that determine the nature of its intelligibility. The constraints are the products of an organization of shared experience, of shared implicit attributions of meaning to the world.

Creativity functions within limits and those limits are social in nature—the creative act or object only exists as such when it can be correctly understood by an audience.

Without the link to that audience, the constraint provided by the necessity of communicating with that audience, the creator is not creating. Without accessing the shared meanings which a society attributes to the symbols at hand, the bricoleur is without tools, the creator makes only empty noise. “Creativity, then, is not really about freedom and the liberation from constraint,” Friedman writes (2001, 60), “It is about the way in which worlds are produced and expressed and the latter are tightly bound by the constraints of content and communication that make creativity a social phenomenon rather than merely an individual idiosyncrasy.”

The combinatorial creativity upon which many anthropologists focus, however, is only one example of the social nature of creativity. Borofsky (2001) pushes creativity further—creativity is a response to the unexpected occurrences, the disruptions, the challenges to tradition and habit and routine that emerge to unsettle us. Creators are those who respond to these unexpected occurrences with unexpected solutions. Those solutions may be a variance to traditional norms. They may even be highly antagonistic to those understood and agreed upon precepts. Indeed, they probably are. Creators break social rules.

Ng (2001) takes the argument to the level of entire societies and argues that certain cultures foster positive attitudes towards conflict, which (owing to the connection between creativity and critical thinking) in turns aids creativity, while other cultures tend to foster attitudes of discomfort with conflict and as a result to inhibit creativity in their populace. Creativity is a form of deviance in the sense that the creator deviates from routine practices and habits in order to respond to the unexpected. While some societies encourage their members to feel comfortable engaging in this kind of creative deviance, others place much more emphasis on the importance of conforming to social norms. These cultural variables, Ng argues, play an important role in fostering or inhibiting creativity within the society.

Arguments about the social propensity to feel comfortable with creative deviance, on both the individual and the communal level, however, still leaves creativity conceptually as an act of will. Further social resources are necessary to bring that deviant creative will to fruition. Using what he calls the “ecosystem perspective,” Harrington addresses the role of social forces in the development of creativity by imagining those external variables which might prevent a person from being able to write a book and therefore be considered “creative”:

What might the story of our missing writer include? It might well be a story of talents never recognized, of books never read, of mentorships never crystallized, of older writers never known, of travels never possible, of energies drained, of others to care for, of mouths to feed, of rents to pay, of rooms to share, of silences, and of invisible men. It might well be a story of ecosystem failure. (1990, 151)

By the term “ecosystem,” Harrington seems to be referring to society, social relations and social forces. In *Art Worlds* (1982), sociologist Howard Becker details all of the components necessary for the production of art. In taking a social view

of the creation of art, Becker analyzes the components surrounding the not-so-lonely-after-all garret and studio that make the existence of those places, and the people inside them, possible. More than just someone to pay the rent and feed the children (although the importance of such people cannot be minimized), creators need whole armies of suppliers, distributors, publishers, patrons, etc. in order to bring their works into existence. Access to this world of others is a key factor in enabling some people, and not others, to express creativity. As Liep notes,

The ability to search for, develop and disseminate the products of creativity also depends on access to material and intellectual resources. Hannerz (1992, 206–8) stressed the importance of public institutions such as debating societies, cafes, cabarets, etc., which facilitate the critical comparison and cross-fertilization of ideas. Sustained creativity in itself demands a certain minimum level of welfare and the circulation of its products requires further resources. If a population is in a state of stark poverty, one can expect no flourishing creativity above the limited ingenuity involved in making ends meet. (2001, 9)

Moreover, other researchers argue that social interactions themselves are *constitutive* of creativity, and that without certain social relationships, creative ideas would not be produced. For example, in discussing the close friendship between Monet and Renoir as it influenced the genesis of Impressionism, Farrell (2001, 41) writes:

They arrived at the vision as they worked alongside one another, commenting on each other's work, experimenting, making mistakes, deciding to include some mistakes, and eventually discovering the effects they preferred. It is not likely that either would have arrived at the new style alone, but together they had the courage to go beyond the limits, creating a new synthesis of the elements they had been working with.

This type of argument is very different from the search for creativity within individual minds addled by mental illness or scarred by childhood experiences. As White (1993, xiii) notes, “Artistic production is stimulated and sustained by an art world—a working community of artists and others—not isolation in some garret. Such stimulation and support are emotional and communicative as much as they are material.” Farrell argues that creation would not take place without collaborative others. Ironically, Freud's own case of creativity in the field of psychoanalysis serves as a case in point for Farrell. He writes of Freud and his collaborator, Fleiss (2001, 186): “Like two computers networked together, they each had access to more ideas and more ways of processing them, which made creativity more likely. This interdependence of cognitive processes, swapping parts of one another's mind, is an important component of instrumental intimacy.” Without a social world of supportive others, the creative ideas themselves would never be born, would never germinate.

The key link between collaboration and creativity is tied to what Ng notes as “critical thinking” and what Farrell calls “a form of deviance—doing something that authorities do not approve.” (2001, 158) Ng writes that (2001, 300–301):

A creative act, by definition, involves the introduction of novel elements into an established domain, and as such it threatens the conventional manner of doing things (Ng 2001). So there will be much social resistance faced by the creator. Instead of succumbing to this insidious pressure to toe the line, the creator must be ready to challenge it, by persevering in the face of obstacles. ... [I]n order to be a successful creator, the person must have the stomach to defend her radical idea against those skeptics who heap scorn on it.

The creator does not necessarily face the insidious pressure to conform all on her own, though. Farrell’s study of the social circumstances under which innovation has appeared in the past suggests that, as in the case of other types of deviant behavior, the presence of a collaborative circle surrounding the creators plays a crucial role in supporting the deviant creation (2001, 270):

[T]hose who advocate the new vision are often viewed as threats by the established authorities at the center of a discipline network. These deviant innovators often become targets of formal and informal sanctions. In the early stages of circle development, the supportive friendships within a circle enable the members to resist pressures to conform to the dominant vision of their field.

Deviance is more likely with the support of a like-minded subculture. This is true in general, not only within the art world. The function of the supportive community of creators, however, is not merely to bolster each other and attack mainstream mores. White (1993), McLeod et al. (1996), Ng (2001), and Farrell (2001) all note the important role of criticism and critique *within* the creative group for pushing creators to advance their innovative ideas. Regarding the social interactions among the painters who formed the original core of what became the Impressionists, Farrell writes (2001, 44) that “Unlike the paired collaborations, the interaction in the café was boisterous and combative. It was in these contentious arguments that the group members were challenged to achieve clarity and consensus about their emerging vision.” Deviants (of all types), in short, push each other to greater heights.

When looking at the art world on Rarotonga, the “collective” part of creativity—from the macro level of cultural heritage to the micro level of friendship groups—plays a critical role in the production of art works. In order to understand how and why this art world arose, I will look more deeply into the society, social relations, social networks and social forces at play as the art world is in the process of formation.

The Setting

Concerning cultural change, Tom Davis, former Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, writes in his autobiography (1992, 302–303):

There was inadequate comprehension of cultural development as a dynamic process or that social and cultural values were the product of an ever-changing and enriching process which was not necessarily deleterious. The culture of 50 years ago was far different from that of today, and from that of 100 years ago. Only certain themes make it recognizable as the same root culture.

This dovetails with a comment made by one of the indigenous artists in this study: “I try to capture what life is like here now, because it won’t be like this forever. Some day, all of this will be gone. It has changed *so much* since I was a child.”

The island of Rarotonga makes a perfect place in which to explore these issues. First and foremost, it is in the process of creating a vibrant art world. Unlike other communities known for their lively art scenes (e.g., Santa Fe, New Mexico), the development of the art world on Rarotonga is very new, only a few years old, so that information about the very earliest beginnings is still fresh in the participant’s minds. More importantly, the formation is still in the process of happening; it is still possible to track the art world participants as they are living the creation process—of art worlds as well as of art works—on a day-to-day basis. The down side of this newness, of course, is that no one knows yet just how viable this art scene will turn out to be. Only time can tell whether this art world will survive and prosper. This book is only the first documentation of the contemporary Rarotongan art world.

Another reason to look at questions of creativity and the formation of art worlds on Rarotonga is that the small size of the population (9,000 inhabitants all together) means that it is possible to interview and interact with the vast majority of art world participants on the island. In the end, although I was not able to formally interview every single artist on the island, I did interview the overwhelming majority. Moreover, although there is a strong connection between the residents of the island and New Zealand, for the most part the Rarotongan art world is fairly self-contained. In this context, I had the opportunity to get a much more complete picture of the art world in its entirety, especially its social networks, than would have been possible in most other locales.

Finally, the nature of Rarotongan society, with its emphasis on generosity, community, and extended family, highlights the idea of “collectivity” as a social norm. The traditional Polynesian culture, still so vibrant in the Cook Islands, is based on reciprocal generosity to such a degree that it is almost inconceivable to those unfamiliar with these societies. While industrialized Westerners are often blinded to the degree of social support upon which they depend, and while that social support is most often masked or entirely hidden, the collective,

interdependent nature of social life—including artistic production—is open and observable in the Cooks.

This book is the result of a year on Rarotonga during 2002–2003. During that time, I was an active participant in the Rarotongan art world. Much of the information presented here comes from formal interviews with artists, gallery owners, and art patrons. There were also, however, countless more informal conversations with the members of the art world as well as with tourism workers, journalists, government officials, and other Rarotongans. These talks were supplemented with newspaper articles, research in the government archives and the Office of Statistics, attending gallery openings, working side-by-side with some of the artists in this study, and living with a Rarotongan Maori family. In addition, I also collected the data to perform a network analysis of the art world as it existed in the crucial 2002–2003 period of the arts explosion. These pieces come together to present a detailed picture of an art world at a critical moment in its formation.

This picture of the Rarotongan art world will focus on creativity as it is facilitated and shaped by social forces. I will be looking at the artists on the island not as isolated individuals whose lonely interior worlds contain the secret of creativity, but as social beings whose relationships with traditional Maori culture, with others (especially family members) in the community, and, most importantly, with each other play a pivotal role in influencing their creative lives. This book will examine the social processes by which creativity emerges in the arts as they are developed in the Cook Islands.

In Chapter 2, I look at the historical context from which the Rarotongan art world emerged as well as at the broad social, economic, and political context within which it exists. Chapter 3 explores the intentional attempts to develop a self-conscious art world to give support for fine art on the island. Finally, in Chapters 4 and 5, I sharpen the focus to the more intimate level of the artists themselves, exploring their work lives, their ideas about art and culture, the importance of race and ethnicity to them, the obstacles that they face in making art, how changes in the sources of status affect them, and how they cope with the economic, political, and social upheaval that has been such an important part of Rarotongan history. I analyze in detail their connections with the art world and, most importantly, with each other. Chapter 6 pulls together some of the main arguments to help answer the questions of why and how: Why did this place at this time experience such a surge of artistic production? And how did this art world come to be built?

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Chapter 2

Te Enua Ou Tumu Te Varovaro: “The Misty Land Whence Comes the Thunder”

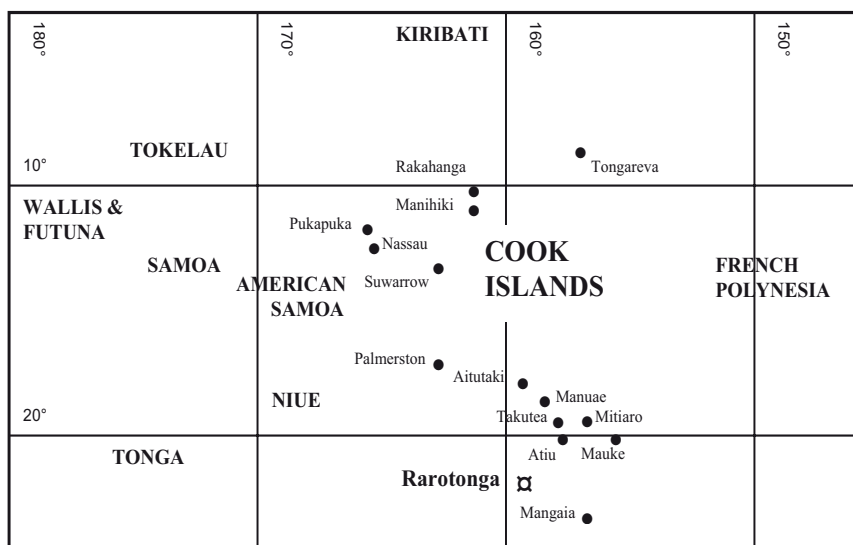


Figure 2.1 Map of the Cook Islands

The Cook Islands are a string of 15 tiny tropical islands scattered across almost two million square kilometers of the South Pacific Ocean (see Figure 2.1). The nearest neighbors to the east are the Austral Islands and French Polynesia, whose capital, Pape’ete, on the island of Tahiti, is about 700 kilometers from the capital of the Cooks, Avarua, on the island of Rarotonga. To the west, even further, are Samoa, Tonga and Niue. To the south there is no other landfall until Antarctica.

The islands themselves are minuscule—only 240 square kilometers of land all together and much of that contained in the two largest islands—Rarotonga and Mangaia—where it is either steep and treacherous mountain jungle (Rarotonga) or swamps and raised coral reef called makatea (Mangaia). So although Rarotonga has 64 square kilometers of area, the inhabitants can live only in the narrow band of relatively flat land that encircles the island at the sea. Averaging about a kilometer wide, this lush and fertile area quickly ascends into a series of jagged mountain ridges (the remains of the volcano that created Rarotonga) in the center of the island. The highest peak rises to 2,140 feet above sea level.

On the coral atolls (formed by volcanic islands that slowly submerged leaving only the ring of coral that once surrounded them), there is much less land. Manihiki, for example, supports about 600 people on 5.4 square kilometers of land stretched around a central lagoon 4 kilometers wide. Pukapuka supports over 600 people on only 1.3 square kilometers of land. Much has been written about the importance of the ocean to the Polynesians, and this cannot be forgotten, but it is land (or the lack of it) that occupies the thoughts of the Cook Islanders and plays a critical role in understanding their world. As Syed and Mataio (1993, 38) note: "Access to and ownership of land are the foundations of Cook Islands social structure and affects almost all aspects of life in the country. Who owns what land may puzzle almost any non-Pacific islander, but the system of ownership and right to access is fundamental to understanding Cook Islands society."

The islands are divided into two groups—the Northern Group are six remote and sparsely populated coral atolls. The furthest of them, Tongareva, is 737 nautical miles from Rarotonga. According to the 2001 census (the most recent figures available), aside from the currently uninhabited Manuae, the Northern Group populations range from 664 on Pukapuka to 48 on Palmerston and only 4 on Suvarrow. (Cook Islands Statistics Office 2002) The Southern Group of nine islands includes both coral atolls and high volcanic islands like Rarotonga. Most of the land and most of the population are in the south. Nine thousand people (half the country's total population) live on Rarotonga—it is the only island in the group to have shown a population gain since the last census in 1996. The other islands (with the exception of Suvarrow, which has held steady at four inhabitants) have all lost population—some markedly. Tongareva's population went from 606 to 357 and Rakahanga dwindled from 249 to 161. Most of these people moved to Rarotonga, the jumping off place for Cook Islanders wishing to emigrate overseas (often in search of work). Indeed, the total population of the country fell from 19,103 to 18,027 between 1996 and 2001.

The islands that now make up the Cooks were not traditionally one political or cultural unit. Although sharing many cultural similarities, until the arrival of Westerners, the islands were autonomous. The indigenous language spoken on Pukapuka in the north, for example, is much closer to Samoan than to Rarotongan Maori. Nevertheless, the twentieth century has seen the intentional development of a national Cook Islands identity (Sissons 1999) constructed around some shared attributes of traditional Maori culture and referred to as "Cook Islands Maori." This constructed identity attempts to build nationhood within the Cooks and to culturally distinguish the Cooks from other Polynesian societies. As population change and movement among the islands works to increase the cultural dominance of Rarotonga, "Cook Islands Maori" is becoming increasingly identified with Rarotonga. As we will see, however, there is a certain amount of tension over this construction, both among the islands and across Polynesia.

Ongoing changes in population are only one aspect of the changes that the residents of these islands have faced for the last two centuries. The history of Rarotonga, like that of most of the other Cook Islands (and, for that matter, most of

the rest of Polynesia), has been characterized by a profound change in the base of the status hierarchy from traditionally Maori concepts of honor to more European concerns with material wealth. This process of change has an ongoing impact on the art world of Rarotonga. In turn, studying the art world provides some insights into the workings of the larger society as it copes with the pressures of change.

Hierarchy and Mana

Cook Islanders trace their ancestry to seven chiefs who arrived on Rarotonga about a thousand years ago from the now unknown ancestral land of Avai'iki. Each of the chiefs took a pie-shaped wedge of land running from the mountains to the sea and ruled over it and his descendants living on it. These divisions, called "tapere,"*¹ still exist today and the families of the chiefs, although scattered all over the island, can trace their genealogy back many generations with great accuracy. Some Rarotongans have family trees, passed down through the generations (first orally and then in written form), showing their descent from the first settlers.

Within the tapere, the highest chiefs were the ariki,* hereditary titles descended from the original seven chiefs. Men generally inherited ariki titles from their fathers or uncles through primogeniture, but it was not unheard of for a woman to reign as ariki even in the old days. Today it is common. Below the ariki were the mataipo,* also hereditary titles but slightly more numerous. Below the mataipo were the rangatiera,* again hereditary and again more numerous. Although descent from the bloodline was crucial and eldest sons were prime candidates for receiving their father's title, the inheritance of a chiefly title was about more than blood. After the death of a chief, the entire extended family—called the "ngati"*—gathered to elect the successor and an eldest son could be passed over if his character, intellect, or behavior seemed to bar him from the title. The decision was very grave. The welfare of the entire community depended on the "mana"* of the chief; it was important to have a chief with strong mana in order to insure that the crops would grow, the sea would yield up its bounty and the enemies of the tribe would be defeated.

Mana was then (and is still now) a key concept for understanding Polynesian society. In Cook Islands culture, "mana" is power and authority accruing to a person largely through moral worth. The possession of mana gave one power and privilege. Some mana is inherited by chiefs along with their titles, as institutionalized power of the office. But mana was also an achieved attribute that individuals could gain or lose by their actions. To become, for example, a skillful builder of boats could augment one's mana. To be cowardly in battle could lose some mana. One idea behind ritually consuming certain body parts of enemies defeated in war was that one assumed the mana of an enemy in this way. Mana could thus be transferred between persons. Mana could even be invested in objects. Mauss (1967, 8)

1 Terms marked with an asterix (*) are defined in the Glossary.

writes: “The taonga [gifts] are, at any rate with the Maori, closely attached to the individual, the clan and the land; they are the vehicle of their *mana*—magical, religious and spiritual power.”

In his dictionary of Cook Islands Maori, Buse (1995, 219) defines *mana*, a Proto-Polynesian word,² as: “(Have) authority (legal, moral, religious) and the powers, rights and prestige which this confers” and gives several interesting examples showing the connection between the moral worth of individuals and the concomitant power and authority that they had: “*Noou oki te basileia, e te mana, e te kaka*. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory (Matt. 6.13); *I apii oki aia ma te mana*. For he taught them like someone who had authority (Mark 1.22).”

Clearly, there is a sacred or supernatural element to *mana*.³ The pan-Polynesian concept translated easily into Christianity, as is clear by Buse’s biblical examples. Partly for that reason, the idea of *mana* is vigorously alive in Rarotongan society today and was sometimes invoked by the artists in this study. For example, one artist told me that he has no respect for the work of one of his peers because it has no *mana*. He defined *mana* as

personal integrity that you take from inside yourself and put into your art. You can tell it when you see it. I don’t care if my work sells or not. I don’t think about the audience. I mean, I do *some*—there’s always the ego thing. But I tell people, ‘That’s why I [have my other job], so I don’t have to worry about selling my work.’

This is an interesting comment in two ways. First, it shows a connection to Mauss’s reports of *mana* being attached to objects by the giver/maker. The artist here did not see his personal internal *mana* as being reduced by the amount that he put into his art. On the contrary, the making of *mana*-ful art *increased* somewhat his personal internal *mana* because it was a valorous act. It moved his status closer to that of a “Taunga,”*⁴ “an expert, skilled craftsman, one with special lore or skill; priest, cleric; doctor.” (Buse 1995, 471) To perform at a highly skilled level enhances one’s *mana*.

This artist’s comment is also interesting because it so clearly illustrates Bourdieu’s idea of “disinterestedness” in play. Disinterestedness is a tactic for

2 The Proto-Polynesian language was spoken about 3,000 years ago—well before the dispersal of the Polynesians across the Pacific Ocean, accounting for the Pacific-wide use of these words and concepts.

3 The related word, “manamana,” for example, means “magic” or “magical powers” (Buse 1995, 220)

4 Not to be confused with “taonga”—“a load, burden, anything carried,” as Mauss used to mean “gift” (a subtle use that highlights the social and religious burdens tied to the gift).

attaining status within the field of cultural production by asserting autonomy. The disinterested producer is free from the shackles of economic concern.

The literary or artistic field is at all times the site of a struggle between the two principles of hierarchization: the heteronomous principle, favourable to those who dominate the field economically and politically (e.g. 'bourgeois art') and the autonomous principle (e.g. 'art for art's sake'), which those of its advocates who are least endowed with specific capital tend to identify with degree of independence from the economy, seeing temporal failure as a sign of election and success as a sign of compromise. ... This explains the inability of all forms of economism, which seek to grasp this anti-economy in economic terms, to understand this upside-down economic world. The literary and artistic world is so ordered that those who enter it have an interest in disinterestedness. (Bourdieu 1993, 40)

The "upside-down" art world favors economic disinterestedness over economic success. Mana is also an "upside-down" economic concept that favors valor over mere material wealth. Disinterestedness, like mana, occupies a sacred place on the social map. Freed from petty concerns, the disinterested actor transcends the quotidian. In the Rarotongan art world, as in other aspects of Polynesian society in general, to achieve disinterestedness is to acquire mana. Achieved mana is often tied to taunga status, the expert who uses his or her skills for the benefit of the community. Taunga status carries with it social responsibilities. The taunga acquires mastery that is used socially, for example, by making the fine mats (and, later, tivaevae) that are used in public ceremonial occasions—as gifts to high-ranking visitors, at marriages, burials, and hair-cutting ceremonies. Women famed for their fine weaving or sewing acquire taunga status and are understood to be the teachers of a younger generation. The concept of mana, then, has a strong component of social utility. Mana is outward directed. The fisherman who brings in large catches that sustain the community is understood to have mana. The midwife who helps bring babies safely into the community has mana. The ariki who rules during times of victory in warfare, abundance, and prosperity for the village has mana. The chief has ascribed power, but it is the benefit to the community of his use of that power that is the measure of the strength of his mana. Rongokea (2001, 34), in her study of the women who make tivaevae,* for example, quotes Rangi Enoka, who exemplifies the outward-directed, non-monetary attitudes of the taunga: "When I learned how to cut tivaevae, women came to me to cut theirs. They wanted to pay me but I was too ashamed to take their money, so I taught some of them and then they knew how to do it themselves."

Family Relations and the Land

Before European contact, the chiefs held sway over the land and its use. They did not own the land, but administered its distribution among the kin group. Within the tapere, the chief dispensed land as it was necessary to those who had need (who had a large extended family, for example) and who made good use of the land. That land was not owned by those who received permission to use it, but was held by them as long as they needed it and then passed to others within the group as needs shifted and changed. Land was not held by individuals, but by extended family groups, the *ngati*, that encompassed many generations. Because marriages between members of different kin groups were common, individuals often had extended family ties to many different areas of land. Complex arrangements of rights and responsibilities for parcels of land scattered all over the island meant that individuals were tied by kinship to several spots towards which there might be duties and responsibilities. One was obligated to one's extended family and to the work shared by the family; one was protected by one's extended family and had rights to the benefits and bounties that befell the family. Extended families with complex and interwoven genealogies meant that every Rarotongan held in his or her head an enormous network of ties which could be called upon for help, which could in turn call upon the individual, and which placed the individual in a hierarchical kinship network revolving around degrees of relatedness to the chiefly hierarchy. Multiple overlapping and cross-cutting kinship ties bound the island together in a dense web of rights and responsibilities. This web of relationships was important because the outward-looking, communal aspect of *mana* was part of a strong ethos of generosity, especially among members of the *ngati*—a striking aspect of Polynesian society even to this day.

On one level, in a land of such natural abundance, generosity and communalism made sense functionally. The staples of the Rarotongan diet were fish, coconuts, taro and breadfruit, supplemented with other fruits and vegetables. The ocean was rich in seafood, both inside and out of the reef. The coconut palms provided not only the nuts, but also material for houses, baskets, mats, and so on. Cooking was done outside in pit ovens that encouraged a system where large amounts of food were prepared at one time to be eaten over several days by many people. The fertility of the high volcanic island meant that life was relatively free from material want and hunger, except at times of natural disaster (such as following the hurricanes that occasionally bombarded the islands of the South Pacific) and when inter-*ngati* or inter-island warfare left man-made destruction in its wake. In the tropical climate, food preservation for long periods was only minimally possible and then was done communally—in the large pits of fermented breadfruit, for example. Individual hoarding makes no functional sense in this context. Far better to distribute widely today's catch of fresh fish (caught in a joint venture out beyond the protective barrier of the encircling reef) and to receive tomorrow a share of the spoils from another cousin's journey to the seabird nests on the mountainside. As Crocombe (2001, 55) notes:

Chinese, for example, grew up in cultures which were conditioned by grain crops which necessitate careful husbandry, conservation, storage between seasons, and first priority being given to one's immediate family. Pacific Islanders, on the other hand, depended on fish, root crops and fruits, little of which was stored. Therefore the greatest gain lay in the widest possible distribution, creating a social investment which required recipients to help when others were in need.

However, although given the climate and the fertility of the land generosity made functional sense for the community, the ethos of communalism was shored up by much more than practical reasoning. Individuals did not calculate the economic incentives behind generosity; instead, generosity was ingrained in the culture through an endless stream of songs, legends, religious practices and other formal and informal rules for behavior. As Mauss (1967, 11) notes: "To refuse to give, or to fail to invite, is—like refusing to accept—the equivalent of a declaration of war; it is a refusal of friendship and intercourse."⁵ The myths and legends of the Cook Islands promulgate this idea. As Kauraka notes (1982, 56, emphasis added): "The theme of *social* justice is apparent in many of these legends. There is always an attempt to put things right." Many of the legends focus on severe punishments meted out to those who hoard objects, who are jealous of others, or who fail to act in the interest of the community.

The tale of "Tautu and Nina-enua" (Rongo 2000, 13–19), for example, tells of a woman, Rongomatane, who tried to keep a dead chief's sacred staff, Nina-enua, for her own sons. The warrior Tautu, as a representative of the ngati, goes to Rongomatane's house to try to recover the staff. Tautu calls out to Rongomatane to return Nina-enua to him.

The treacherous Rongomatane decided that she would throw [a forked spear] down at the caller and kill him with it ... Rongomatane threw [the spear]! However, Tautu, being a warrior of the first rank, reacted quickly. He turned his body sideways catching the forked spear in mid-air and holding it firm. Tautu was also on his guard now realizing that Rongomatane was not recognizing his claim to Nina-enua. Tautu also knew that in the code of the warrior he could not simply storm into the home of a woman and take the weapons from her by force.

5 Mauss added his own evaluation of socially-compelled generosity (1967, 67–69): "Social insurance, solicitude in mutuality or co-operation, in the professional group and all those persons called Friendly Societies, are better than the mere personal security guaranteed by the nobleman to his tenant, better than the mean life afforded by the daily wage handed out by managements, and better even than the uncertainty of capitalist savings. ... A wise precept has run right through human evolution, and we would be as well to adopt it as a principle of action. We should come out of ourselves and regard the duty of giving as a liberty, for in it there lies no risk. A fine Maori proverb runs: 'Ko maru kai atu/Ko maru kai mai/ Ka ngohe ngohe.' 'Give as much as you receive and all is for the best.'"

... Rongomatane knew that she must not delay or the staff would go to Tautu on its own and she did not want Tautu to have the staff of Karika; she still hoped to keep it for her sons. And so Rongomatane threw the staff aiming it at Tautu—to kill him!

However Tautu ... caught the flying object with his teeth!

At that moment the two sons of Rongomatane who had been hiding behind the foot of the big 'Ava tree jumped out at Tautu to take Nina-enua from him, but they could not match Tautu's experience and skill and so, using Nina-enua, he fought and struck them both dead.

Tautu did not kill Rongomatane for her treachery, however, as she was a woman and not a warrior, but he left her alone to bury her dead and her jealousies without his help.

Rongomatane violated the ethos of generosity—she was selfish and she was jealous. It is important to note that her punishment was not death, but isolation. She lost her family—her sons—and Tautu “left her alone.” The value of communalism is upheld. It is both a social norm and its own reward.

Much of this norm of generosity is encapsulated in what is called “The Polynesia Way”* or “The Pacific Way.” Crocombe writes (2001, 159):

‘The Pacific Way’ was used from 1970 to summarize common values, practices and sentiments in the region which differed from those of the Europeans and Asians. These include emphasis on distribution and consumption as against saving and investment; priority for extensive kinship networks; spending a high proportion of time and resources on ceremonies associated with initiation, marriage, death, accession to chiefly titles and other community events; and a lower priority for work time and output.

The norm of generosity is still very much alive in Rarotonga today. And the strictures against those who violate this norm still involve being cast out of the community (at least symbolically). For example, one woman to whom I spoke related an instance of failure to share committed by another Rarotongan Maori woman who had returned to the island after several years of living in New Zealand. “She is not like us,” the first woman said. “She is not Maori [anymore].” The recognized source of this ethos, however, is now as likely to be Christianity as it is to be traditional Maori ideology. Another contact noted disparagingly a cousin’s growing preoccupation with accumulating money by saying, “She has forgotten all the things that they tell us in church.” Lest it appear, though, that the ethos of generosity exists only in its absence, I also overheard one cousin casually, laughingly say to another with whom she had temporarily taken up residence, “Everything that’s yours is mine now!” One artist told me, “We teach the children that there are two kinds of people—the ones who give and the ones who take. The ones who are always giving are good and the ones who are always taking are bad. That’s the culture here. It always has been.”

“Communal,” however, does not mean “equal.” The ethos of generosity flourished within an hierarchical system with chiefs (in the various gradations) at the top and commoners on the bottom. The intensive knowledge of genealogy was necessitated by the importance of knowing one’s place in the social hierarchy—the degree of relational closeness to those at the top. Genealogies are recited with reference to the *chiefs* in one’s lineage, not the commoners. Chiefs controlled the members of the *ngati*—requiring food from them, assigning them labor on village projects, drafting them for inter-*ngati* or inter-island warfare. Chiefs could take land away from a family’s use or even impose a “*raui*”^{*}—a moratorium on harvesting or fishing within a certain area. The *raui* is supposed to be an ecological safeguard against over-fishing or over-harvesting certain areas, giving the natural resources in those areas a chance to recover. But the *raui* is easily exploited to control troublesome underlings. The dual nature of this logic can be seen in the word “*tapu*,”^{*} from which English derived the word “taboo.” In English, taboo means forbidden, banned or restricted. In Maori, however, the meaning is more complex: “Holy, sacred, taboo, under interdict or restriction, under curfew. *Kia tapu kotou, te tapu nei ‘oki au. Be holy, even as I am now.*” (Buse 1995, 452) The chief could control the use of the land and sea, and thus the daily lives of the people who depended on the land and sea, because he could make certain places *tapu*—holy and, therefore, restricted. The higher a person’s rank in the social hierarchy and, linked with that, the more *mana* a person had, the more that person had power to control others lower in hierarchy through the conferral of *tapu*, of which *raui* is only the most obvious example.

The boundaries of the *tapere* themselves were not fixed, but were a source of conflict and war among the kin groups. Before the arrival of the missionaries on Rarotonga, inter-family fighting over *tapere* boundaries was frequent and bloody. Oral histories detail conflicts involving thousands of warriors. Warfare was, with good reason, one of the chief fears of the Europeans as they ventured into the islands of the Pacific. But the Cook Islanders readily grasped the tactical significance of the foreigners’ marvelously advanced weaponry. They were more eager to trade with the white skins than to fight them. It was the inter-*ngati* conflict over land that likely facilitated the acceptance of Christianity among the Rarotongans, as it had also on other Polynesian islands, such as Tahiti.

Early Contact

By the time Captain Goodenough thought he “discovered” Rarotonga in 1820, following sandlewood traders and Bounty mutineers (Maretu 1983, 46–7), it had been inhabited for about 1,000 years by Polynesians who were part of a very widespread and surprisingly (given the vast distances between the islands)

homogeneous culture.⁶ Bloody inter-ngati warfare over tapere boundaries and island domination had existed for centuries with the result that one kin group or another was always temporarily in ascendancy until it was toppled by another. Although the system seems to have achieved a somewhat balanced stasis on Rarotonga, on other Polynesian islands (Rapa Nui, or Easter Island, is the most famous example) the quest for dominion over rivals led to serious destruction of natural resources and human population.⁷ On Rarotonga, the early contacts with European and American traders, explorers, whalers and colonialists had introduced the population to a new and highly desirable parade of material objects, especially iron and other metal, which was lacking on the Pacific islands. Across the Pacific, the foreigners often mistook the ariki of whatever area in which they happened to land or who happened to be in a momentary position of inter-ngati dominance as the permanent “King” or “Queen” of the island and, by their own actions, helped to bring about that permanence. Lummis gives an excellent account of this process as it occurred on Tahiti:

The power of the paramount chiefs, however, was not accepted without question, and wars between districts and islands were quite common. ... All this changed with the advent of the Europeans. Access to iron and, eventually, to muskets and powder gave the chief with whom the Europeans traded power over his rivals. It was by this means, plus the backing of the Christian missionaries whose faith he professed, that Chief Pomare extended his power so as to be king over the whole of Tahiti in 1815. The attraction of European goods, particularly metal tools and, increasingly, arms and ammunition meant that the chiefs tried to keep European ships anchored in their territory and trading under their auspices. This trade created economic pressures which had political consequences; in order to supply the needs of the increasing number of ships that called there the paramount chiefs needed more and more land and people under their control – so power was gradually centralised. (Lummis 1997, 21)

The European missionaries, who often followed the traders and colonialists and who stayed behind as an occupying force, played a key role in solidifying this change. They insisted on the end of inter-ngati warfare, thus making permanent

6 As Crocombe (2001, 48) argues, “... mixing with other peoples was probably less than for any other population on earth except the Inuit and the early Australians. That enabled Polynesian peoples to retain a high degree of homogeneity over a huge area for centuries.” This cultural homogeneity is still evident in the language similarities of the Polynesians as far away from each other as New Zealand, Hawaii, and Rapa Nui (Easter Island), the three corners of the “Polynesian Triangle,” the largest unified cultural area on the planet.

7 An analogous example is the potlatch ceremony of the Native American tribes of the Pacific Northwest, which is also fueled by the confluence of ideologies valuing generosity as a source of high status and hierarchical inter- and intra-tribe relations.

the formerly temporary system of kin group hierarchy that had existed when they arrived or had been created by the arrival of the foreigners. At the top of this hierarchy, they inevitably placed a chief who professed conversion to Christianity. This was, not surprisingly, an important inducement to conversion. That chief's position was then supported by all of the considerable force that the missionaries could bring to bear. More importantly, perhaps, they sanctified the new structure by layering Christian ideas of holiness on top of Maori traditional ideas of mana. The fluidity of the idea of mana, based on actions and behaviors as well as inheritance, was replaced by concepts that the missionaries could more readily grasp—European ideas more akin to the Divine Right of Kings.

Traditional Arts and Crafts, Dance and Music

At the time of the European's arrival on Rarotonga, the island had a flourishing cultural life, the various aspects of which still form the basis of the Cook Islands art world today. Both Idiens (1990) and Buck (1927) provide comprehensive studies of Cook Islands arts and crafts broken down by types of artwork (weaving, stone carving, wood carving, and so on.) But for the purposes here, it is more helpful to look at some of the themes running across the artistic disciplines to see common threads that have survived to inform Cook Islands art today and which provide the basis of much of the current contention about the appropriate use of ancestral imagery. Particularly important is the use of certain decorative motifs across many art forms and the ideas of tapu attached to those motifs.

As Mason (2003, 59) points out: "While body decoration has been a phenomenon of many societies, the art of tattooing—engraving the skin—reached its zenith in Polynesian societies." The word tattoo derives from the Maori "tatatau".* The distinctive geometric patterns and highly stylized, abstracted natural forms of humans, animals and plants (see example in Figure 2.2) may have some basis in the decorative traditions of Lapita earthenware (Mason 2003, 60), shards of which are often found in Polynesian archaeological sites. It is important to note the tapu aspects of the tattoo. It is not mere ornamentation, but rather formed a marker of one's place within the community. Mason (2003, 61) writes:

A tattoo symbolized initiation—generally a child entering into the adult world. One writer describes the ordeal of tattooing as having much in common with the beatings, circumcision and nose-piercing that are often important within initiation cycles. Tattoos were thought to enhance power and act as a talisman. Tattoo signified the status of the person tattooed and sometimes portrayed a person's genealogy. ... When it came to the choice of tattoos 'age, gender, social rank, the personality of the tattooed person and his/her membership of a specific group were all factors which contributed to the choice of motifs,' and, in some societies, the extent of the tattooing.

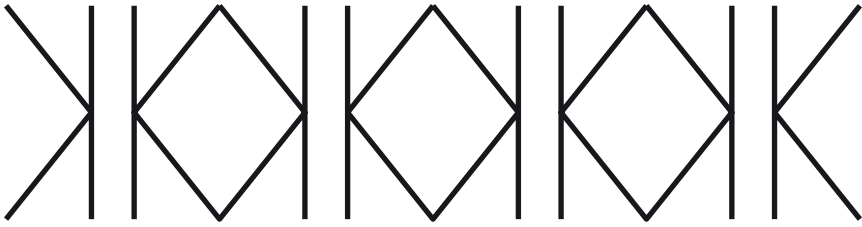


Figure 2.2 Double K Tattoo Motif

The sacred element of tattoo motifs perhaps underlay the importance that the missionaries attached to obliterating the practice and the difficulty that they encountered in doing so. Half a century after their arrival on Rarotonga, the missionaries were able to finally outlaw the practice. It was little practiced until it again became popular starting in the 1970s.

The revival of tattooing in the twentieth century, too, rested in large part upon the symbolic value of the tattoos. Mason (2003, 65) writes: “The reasons for the revival are varied but undoubtedly relate to some degree to the reclaiming of political rights and making a statement about cultural identity, as well as aesthetic choice.” Tattooing was part of the rediscovery of traditional Maori customs that was part of the indigenous rights movements that gained strength around the globe in the second half of the twentieth century. The resurrected patterns and symbols thus had the added significance of political markers as well as cultural ones. Use of traditional motifs became a political statement.

The motifs common in tattooing are found across the spectrum of indigenous Cook Islands arts and crafts. The “Double K” motif depicted in Figure 2.2, for instance, a highly abstracted human form, appeared in tattoos (Mason 2003, 62), on wood carvings of staff gods and slab gods (Idiens 1990, 23–6), on ceremonial adzes (Idiens 1990, 41–2), woven into mats (Buck 1927, 155), and painted on tapa cloth. Originally possibly a symbol of unity or strength, the form sanctified the person or object that it adorned. It was not to be taken lightly. As Idiens notes (1990, 11):

Contact between persons possessing greater or lesser degrees of mana was restricted by the laws of tapu and led to elaborate regulations governing most aspects of everyday life. No one of low rank would dare touch the person or belongings of someone with greater mana for fear of the consequences, which might be fatal.

By the late twentieth century, the use of traditional motifs became part of a cultural identity struggle. These images and types of images were considered by many to be tapu—restricted to those who could claim legitimacy of use, ethnic Maoris. Those who used the symbols without the right to do so, Europeans and other whites, practiced desecration and sacrilege.

Objects had sacred power attached to them. Their making and their use were part of the ritual life of the community. Both men and women participated in these activities, with the gifts made by women (mats and tapa especially) often holding a place of pride in a group's ceremonies. For example, of tapa* making, Lummis (1997, 25) notes:

This labour-intensive practice was women's work ... The clothing made from this cloth for religious and ceremonial use was as elaborate and complex as anything worn by the ladies of European courts. Tapa was also used extensively as ceremonial gifts and ritual offerings. Such gifts were made by chiefs to the priests and to other chiefs.

There was high symbolic status attached to these objects. Visual culture pervaded daily life and the symbols that adorned objects in many ways tied together the whole cosmology of the Cook Islands Maori.

Likewise, cultural performance (music and dance) were available to all and participation was widely encouraged. Mason and Williams (2003, 25) note that:

[a]ccording to William Wyatt Gill, a missionary who served on Mangaia [another of the southern Cooks] from 1852 to 1874, mothers oiled and then kneaded the tiny limbs of their babies '... stretching and cracking each joint ...' to aid flexibility in the dance.

Music and dance often recreated key legends and important moments in the Rarotongan's history. Without a written language, the Cook Islanders preserved their history orally and visually.

The arrival of foreigners, especially the European missionaries, was the beginning of profound changes to the way of life in the Cook Islands. It became increasingly difficult to preserve traditional culture and lifestyles in the face of the often overwhelming and devastating foreign impact. Changes involved not only demographic changes, legal changes, and cultural changes, but also the beginning of an important change in the basis of *status*—a change that the Cooks are still undergoing today.

Post-Contact Changes

As Gilson notes (1980, 37), "One of the most drastic consequences of European contact was the introduction of disease." From the vaguely identified "scrofulous disease," through whooping cough, mumps, measles, influenza and dysentery, the Cook Islanders suffered wave after wave of foreigner-induced death. One important source of infection was the clothing that the missionaries brought with them from England. Infested with fleas, lice, dirt and germs, the clothing (mostly used clothes donated by the English faithful—not only unhygienic, but also

profoundly ill-suited to the tropical environment) was meant by the missionaries as an important part of their program of “civilization.” So rigorous were the English missionaries in their imposition of this clothing that, to this day, the Cook Islands Maori term for “foreigner” is “papa’a”⁸—literally, “four layers”—in reference to the numbers of layers of garments that the missionaries inflicted upon the inhabitants of these hot and humid islands. Although the missionaries’ plan to have the Cook Islanders start cultivating cotton and producing their own cloth on the island was a quick failure, the introduction of foreign-produced cotton fabric was the end of tapa clothing and the beginning of the end of tapa production and ceremonial use.

The missionary program of civilization also included replacing the Cook Islanders’ habit of daily bathing with the European aversion to water, changing the fish and fruit based diet of the Rarotongans for the much less healthy diet to which the Europeans were accustomed,⁸ and doing away with the native sanitary facilities in favor of the European-style cesspits. In short, the missionaries tried to transplant the conditions of nineteenth century London into the Polynesian environment, resulting in the decimation of the indigenous population due to disease. Estimates of Rarotonga’s population before the arrival of the missionaries range from a low of 5,000 to a high of 20,000 inhabitants. The missionary Aaron “Buzacott stated that more than 5,000 died between 1827 and 1843 ...” (Gilson 1980, 38) By the time of the first missionary census in 1854, there were only 2,374 people left. It would be a century later before the population hit even the 5,000 mark again.

The effects of this kind of decimation of the population were, of course, widespread and overwhelming. One of the most important outcomes was the solidification of the adoption of Christianity. The European missionaries had developed immunities to many of the diseases that they brought with them to the South Pacific and therefore suffered much less mortality than did the indigenous people. As a consequence, many indigenous people believed that the ravages of disease were proof of the Christian God’s displeasure with the people. The European god spared his believers and killed the Cook Islanders. The Maori gods were apparently powerless to protect them.⁹

8 This unfortunate pattern of seeing foreign food as preferable to native produce still holds true in Rarotonga today, which negative consequences not only for the health of Cook Islanders, but also for the balance of trade. Syed and Mataio (1993, 101) write: “The country has become increasingly dependent on imported food. It spent \$22.7 million on food imports in 1990, which accounts for 27 percent of the country’s total imports. An average household currently spends nearly 70 percent of its food expenditure on imported food.”

9 Christianity still has a very strong hold on the Cook Islanders. The vast majority of Rarotongans belong to a Christian church, 65 percent the Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC), which was renamed from the London Missionary Society Church only in the mid-twentieth century. Another 15 percent of islanders are Catholic and several Protestant evangelical sects (most notably, the Assemblies of God, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh

Another effect was the widespread racial mixing as the tiny island Maori populations were overwhelmed by generation after generation of foreign men who fathered children with local women. Crocombe asserts that owing to the drastic drop in indigenous populations combined with often large numbers of foreigners seeking sex with Polynesian women, (2001, 55–6) “... probably there is no person of Hawai’i, French Polynesia, Rapanui, Cook Islands, New Zealand or most of Micronesia who does not have some European, Asian and/or other non-Polynesian/Micronesian genes, even though many are not aware of it.”

The missionaries also introduced fundamental changes into the culture and political structure of the islands. The flexible and communal use of land was ended and ideas about freehold ownership took its place. As had happened in England with the fencing in of the commons, the changes in ownership away from communal use of land meant that the islanders’ material existence could have become much more precarious. Individual ownership would have taken away the safety net of the Polynesia Way. In such a system, had it been actually adopted by the Cook Islanders, family members become reduced to units of labor power. The horrors of industrialization that England was experiencing just at that time vividly illustrate the brutality of untrammelled capitalism. However, the persistence of the Cook Islanders’ communal traditions, and their resistance to European ways of thinking, stymied many of these changes. One Rarotongan, for instance, related a story about her mother in the first half of the twentieth century that exemplifies the Cook Islanders’ method of adapting traditional modes of generosity to the imposition of capitalism:

Mum was very beautiful as a young girl. She was the cashier for A.B. Donalds [one of the first important trading companies and general stores on the island] and when she came out of work in the evenings, sometimes the old men would be waiting for her. There were no pensions in those days. The children of several of them had gone overseas. They would come up to her and say, ‘Ma’ine, Ma’ine [Miss, Miss], could I have a bag a sugar?’ or ask her for something else, canned goods or food. She told the salespersons to give the men what they needed and to charge the cost to her account. They probably did not understand that she still had to pay for the goods. The men never knew that she was doing that. The men asked her for what they needed. She gave permission and the salespersons gave the goods. Mum paid for the goods afterwards when she paid for her account. Understandably, she also became the recipient of much kindness from others—often people would just leave food on her veranda, even though she did not know who gave what.

The missionaries made several attempts to turn the Cook Islanders into capitalist producers, instituting cash cropping instead of subsistence agriculture and trying

Day Adventists and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) have also gained a toe-hold in recent years.

to set up small scale industries, such as the aforementioned cotton processing. The chiefs were politically disenfranchised and became figureheads for the real power of the pulpit so that status was soon seen as a function of church membership rather than as based on mana. This flattened the levels of the hierarchy and kinship ties became much more egalitarian.

Importantly, the missionaries also set up school systems that replaced the old taunga status with church teaching that passed on none of the lore or skills of the traditional ways down to the next generation. Originally, the schools were only for the purpose of teaching Christianity to the local population. Later, more instruction was added to the curriculum, although religious education remained the chief component. Children were punished for displaying traditional attitudes and ideas and, after the English language program was set up, for using the Maori language. For example, regarding the reaction to dancing, one islander in her 80s remembered her education with the Catholic sisters: "They would beat the girls if we moved even a little bit. We had to sing standing perfectly still. But we weren't doing anything wrong—we just wanted to move because of the joy of the music." Schooling became formalized and students who showed aptitude and wished to continue on were soon being sent away to New Zealand. Many of them would never return. Those who did return were vastly changed by the experiences that they had overseas. This is still true today.

The European missionaries did introduce one important new art form to the Cook Islands—the tivaevae,¹⁰ literally meaning "patches." The missionaries' wives first began teaching this to native women as European-style quilt making. The missionaries understood the utility of quilts in a way that they did not understand disposable tapa clothing and the fine weaving of mats. Imported, brightly-colored cotton cloth quickly replaced the laboriously produced tapa, which is hardly ever made on Rarotonga today. Likewise, the weaving of fine mats went into steep decline.¹¹ Nevertheless, local women adapted the tivaevae to traditional customs—incorporating into the tivaevae the beautiful patterns of tapa cloth and fine weaving to make the "quilts" function much more like the fine mats and large tapa used to function. Tivaevae now take the role in important ceremonies (marriages, funerals, hair cuttings) that fine mats would have done in the pre-contact era. And certainly the amount of labor involved in producing a high-quality tivaevae can equal the amount of labor formerly spent beating and decorating a large tapa. Moreover, like the tapa making and the weaving of their great-grandmothers, today's tivaevae makers often work in groups of women, so that many of the same social functions of shared labor are fulfilled. Rongokea (2001, 11) writes: "Tivaevae making

10 Some argue that the correct spelling should be "tivaivai," but most literature on the subject uses the "tivaevae" spelling.

11 The only fine weaving still widely practiced in the Cooks today—although it mostly pales in comparison to the artistry of the pre-contact era—is the weaving of rito hats, which are worn by Cook Islands women and are sold at very hefty prices (for the authentic article) to tourists.

continues to be a community-centered activity (although some women prefer to work alone), with women in the different villages sewing their tivaevae in vaine-tini [women's groups]. Working in these groups, the women eat together, sing, and talk about themselves, their families and their community."

Almost all other arts and crafts, however, were suppressed. This was especially true of those that related to the old practices of the traditional religion which could not be transformed into Christian practices (traditional chants into church hymns, for example), such as dancing and, especially, the carving of the idols. The effect of the proscriptions against the old ways was undermined, however, by the missionaries themselves. Almost immediately upon the suppression of the carving of Cook Islands god figures, for example, the carving of the gods was resumed because a profitable trade in island "curios" had sprung up. As Buck (1993, 25) notes:

By the destruction and exile of the images of the Manganian gods [in the early nineteenth century], the symbolic portrayal of the gods as a religious trait and a form of art also disappeared. The adze symbols of Tane-mata-ariki were given away; but native craftsmen, realizing that they were sought after as 'curios' by Europeans, began to make them as objects of trade.

Moreover, native carvers responded to the desires of the new customers for their wares by making stylistic changes that would appeal to the foreigners. Idiens (1990, 41–2) writes: "Ceremonial adzes continued to be made in the nineteenth century to satisfy the European souvenir trade, and increasingly large and elaborate handles of pierced and stepped pedestal form became fashionable to meet this demand." This was the beginning of the Cook Islands art market.

Maretu (1983, 151–2), in fact, provides an almost slapstick eyewitness account of the missionaries' zeal to acquire the objects produced by the islanders:

Tug-of-war over an idol [July 1845]

Without sitting down, [head missionary Aaron] Buzacott said, 'Where's the idol you wrote to us about?'

'There is a Manganian idol in the box over there.' Buzacott went over quickly and opened the box. William Gill [another missionary] grabbed the idol.

When they bent down they both bumped their foreheads on the table, perspiring profusely as they wrestled for the stone idol. Buzacott called out, 'Whose is it Maretu?'

'It's for Buzacott, because he is going away to the land of the Europeans,' I answered. Gill then let go of the wrapped up idol.

'Oroiti is the name of that idol,' I said.

British Colony and New Zealand Protectorate

Beginning in the late 1800s, the influence of the missionaries began to wane, not just in Rarotonga but all across the South Pacific. Part of the reason for this came from the outside as countries like England, France, the United States, and Germany began looking to establish dominance over the islands in political maneuvering designed to prevent their competitors from gaining a territorial edge in the age of empire building. The British became increasingly interested in the Cooks as Tahiti fell under the control of the French and Samoa was partitioned between Germany and the United States. But the move away from missionary control also came from inside the islands. In the 1880s, Cook Islanders began requesting that the British government take over the governing of the territory. The government of Rarotonga (and eventually all the Cook Islands) went through a series of changes for twenty years, becoming a British Protectorate in 1888 and being annexed to New Zealand in 1900–1901. The highest authority on the island now was the New Zealand Resident Commissioner who worked in conjunction with the local chiefly hierarchy to set up governing structures, including a variety of boards to oversee commerce on the island. No longer based on subsistence agriculture, the Cook Islands economy was pushed heavily in the direction of export agriculture. A dizzying variety of schemes were put into place to encourage Cook Islanders to participate in the capitalist mode of production, farming copra, tomatoes, and citrus fruits or engaging in very small scale manufacturing. These schemes inevitably failed owing to a combination of enormous transportation costs, lack of economies of scale, widespread corruption and massive government incompetence. (Nevertheless, similar schemes abound today—with similar rates of failure for similar reasons.)

Key to the changes taking place in the Cooks a century ago was the finalization of land ownership laws and the establishment of the Land Court to adjudicate disputes. Flexible sharing under the control of the chiefs was abolished and land was portioned out to individual owners. Land could not be sold and was inherited equally by all heirs upon the death of the original owner. This meant that within a very few generations, the pieces of land were jointly owned sometimes by hundreds of individuals, extended family members all of whom had a say in the use of the land. Meetings of the entire *ngati* were frequent and lengthy over every issue having to do with every tiny plot of land. The Polynesia Way requires at least majority, and sometimes unanimous, consent for action to be taken and all family members who wished it were accorded the right to speak as much and as often as they wished. Within the *ngati*, disputes over the use of particular pieces of land could go on for years and years—still a feature of Cook Islands life. Family meetings are frequent and lengthy and questions about the use of land remain unsettled even across generations. The land court meets regularly for several days every month and hears an exhausting docket of cases regarding the intricacies of land disputes (often settled by genealogy). This is only one part of the equation when disputes about land use arise. The discussions within the family are the other

part. Land can be leased to outsiders (if the family agrees) and the leases can be as long as 60 years, but land can still not be sold in the Cook Islands and Rarotongans jealously guard and watch over their various land interests, which, because of the intricacies of the kinship networks, are spread all over the island and sometimes extend to other islands as well.

Although lip service was paid to tradition and the authority of the chiefs in setting up these legal structures, in reality the traditional leaders of the island were no more than figure heads and window dressing during most of the period of foreign rule. Stripped of any practical power, the chiefs and the traditional hierarchy scraped by for years holding on as best they could to traditional ideas and ways, preserving memories of the old times that were slowly slipping away.

During this era, the education of Cook Islands children—especially the well-to-do—went firmly overseas. Without any tertiary education on the island and with only minimal secondary education available, children of the educated class were invariably shipped to New Zealand to complete their education. The majority never returned; as a result, the population of Cook Islanders who now live overseas is eight times the number who live in the islands. The “foreign” Cook Islanders mostly do not speak Maori and many have forgotten most of the traditional customs. But because of land laws, they still may claim the right to occupy land in the Cooks. When foreign-raised and -educated Cook Islanders *do* return, they increasingly bring with them sophisticated political ideas about indigenous rights that they have learned from contact with the civil rights movements sweeping the globe, especially in New Zealand where the heaviest concentration of foreign Cook Islanders resides. Indeed, the move for Cook Islands independence gathered as much strength in the Maori enclaves of New Zealand as it did in the Cooks themselves.

The annexation to New Zealand lasted until 1965 when the Cook Islanders became a self-governing independent state in free association with New Zealand. This means that New Zealand handles national defense and other international affairs while the Cooks are internally self-governing. The Cooks issue their own currency, but also use New Zealand currency—the Cook Island dollar value is tied to the New Zealand dollar at a one-to-one exchange rate. Importantly for the movement of population, all Cook Islanders have New Zealand citizenship, but New Zealanders cannot claim Cook Island citizenship. New Zealanders cannot own property in the Cook Islands, but Cook Islanders living abroad do not lose claims to family lands in the Cooks.

Internal Self-Government

The achievement of internal self-government was followed nine years later by the opening of the airport at Rarotonga in 1974 and the beginning of international tourism. This, as much as anything, may have defined the post-independence Cook Islands. The opening of the airport precipitated yet another wave of change to

Table 2.1 Number of Visitors and Number of Hotel Rooms

Year	Number of Visitors	Number of Rooms
1973	1,776	65
1976	9,898	108
1979	19,722	309
1987	29,569	409
1990	30,439	497
1995	47,899	672
2001	74,575	793

Source: Cook Islands Development Plan 1982–1985 and Cook Islands Annual Statistical Bulletin

the Cook Islanders' way of life, the most import aspect of which was that money was now to be made on the island from tourists. This soon became one of the chief sources of income for the local people and family-run, two-or-three-room accommodations soon sprang up on beach-front locations encircling the island. Note in Table 2.1 the remarkable expansion of tourism between 1973 (the year before the airport opened) and 1976 as well as the continued steady development of the tourist trade. Syed and Mataio note (1993, 67): "Tourism currently generates 30 percent of government's total revenue (excluding foreign budgetary support), its single biggest source."

The geographical shape of tourist development, with much of the accommodation ringing the shore, led one local to point out that, "Everything from the [coastal] road out belongs to the tourists; everything from the road in belongs to us." With over 70,000 tourists visiting each year, the small accommodations gradually grew in size to have a dozen or more rooms. There are now 35 establishments averaging 23 rooms apiece (although the average is skewed upwards by the two large resorts, the Rarotongan Beach Resort and the Edgewater Resort. Without them, the average size is about 15 rooms.) Hotels and restaurants make up about ten percent of the GDP.

Over the course of the twentieth century, export agriculture on a large scale had never been truly successful, but during the last years of the century, exporting black pearls (farmed mainly in the Northern Group) began to take off. For comparison, exports of fruits and vegetables were valued at CI\$302,000 in 1976 and CI\$249,000 in 2001, (Cook Islands Statistics Office 2002) but pearl exports grew from CI\$596,000 in 1989 (the first year for which there are figures) to CI\$14,591,000 in 2001. (Cook Islands Statistics Office 2002) Pearls now account for 90.4 percent of Cook Islands exports by value.

Despite the success of tourism and exporting black pearls, the economy of the Cooks is still based on subsidies from New Zealand. The country suffers from a massive and steadily increasing trade imbalance. The balance of trade was

-CI\$11,150,000 in 1976 (Cook Islands Statistics Office 2002) and had grown to -CI\$95,484,000 in 2001 despite the fact that exports had increased eightfold in value (CI\$2,220,000 to CI\$16,132,000) during that same period. The ocean still teems with fish, the trees still drop so much fruit that the pigs are fed with papayas, mangoes and avocados that would otherwise be left to rot. But Rarotongans dine on imported tinned mackerel from Japan and corned beef from New Zealand and drink imported soft drinks. Of course, amenities like electronics, computers, cars, household appliances, building supplies, and other implements of modern life are also imported. Former Prime Minister Tom Davis, who oversaw the development of the economy during the late 1970s and 1980s, notes that, “All these cars you see are my fault. When I got the economy fixed up, the first thing everyone on this island did was go out and buy a car.” With the full-fledged entrance into the capitalist economy, status—at least of a sort—could now be purchased with material goods.

While material goods were pouring into the Cooks after the airport opened, people began pouring out. The population had been steadily climbing since the first official census in 1902, but it suddenly dropped from 21,322 in 1971 to 18,126 in 1976. (Cook Islands Statistics Office 2002) Outer islanders began to move to Rarotonga and from Rarotonga the population continued to flow out of the country, mostly to New Zealand. Every island in the country, with the single exception of Pukapuka, lost population during those five years during which international air travel first became possible. (Cook Islands Statistics Office 2002) Many of those leaving were part of a “brain drain” of the best and the brightest who left the Cooks for New Zealand to pursue higher education, never to return.

Moreover, economic opportunities also called outer islanders first to Rarotonga and then on to New Zealand. This pattern still holds today. The local newspapers often feature rather poignant articles detailing the difficulties that young people, especially, face in trying to negotiate the pull between economic opportunity and family ties. An example, titled “Torn between work and family,” from the *Cook Islands Herald* (Glassie 2002, 5) is fairly typical:

Repeta Alice George is missing her family in Aitutaki but she’s also enjoying making the most of her new job in Rarotonga. ... The 25 year-old admits that she’s torn between the love for her job and the family she misses in Aitutaki. ‘After I returned from New Zealand after 2 years, I decided to return to Aitutaki,’ she said. Of course her main reason was to be close to her family, especially her parents. ‘I missed my parents so much, I had to come back to Aitutaki.’ She said that her intention was to find a job in Aitutaki and settle there. Unfortunately, it didn’t turn out that way. ... ‘I didn’t want to leave Aitutaki, as I had just returned there, but I had no choice.’

Other articles are more succinct: “Why, for instance,” the author of one wonders in print, “would a young person of 18 years of age who has enjoyed what Rarotonga has to offer, want to go back to somewhere like Rakahanga?” (C. Pitt, 2 November

2002, 6) The same logic can easily be extended to New Zealand and beyond. An artist with extensive contacts on the outer islands told me, "One of the ariki from Mauke told me last week that the girls are all leaving the island because they don't want to just sit there and weave hats for the rest of their lives." The move to Rarotonga is only the first step in the progression to New Zealand for Cook Islanders hoping to find better economic circumstances for themselves and their families. According to Crocombe (2001, 66): "83% of Cook Islanders live in New Zealand, Australia and elsewhere."

With the well-to-do seeking higher education and many of the less well-off also leaving in pursuit of better job opportunities, the structure of the economy began to change. The economic changes wrought by the opening of the island to the outside were all refracted through the prism of Polynesian tradition, however, so that new kinds of poverty and wealth emerged.

New Kinds of Poverty and Wealth

It is often difficult to determine what we mean by "poverty" and "wealth" in a place like the Cooks where the cash economy plays a much smaller part in people's lives and welfare than it does in advanced industrialized countries. Given the persistence of the ethos of generosity as it facilitates an informal but highly effective barter-type economy and also given that land ownership laws make it difficult to judge the amount of "wealth" that an individual controls, traditional measures of inequality can badly miss the mark in the Cooks. Informal economies are difficult to track and analyze. The influx of outer islanders without local families and land to depend on in Rarotonga, though, has begun to disrupt the communalism that formed the backbone of the economy since the pre-contact days. To try to see how inequality had changed over time in the Cooks, I instead used a measure of day-to-day living conditions—the number of people per room in a household. I constructed Gini scores using the data from the 1966, 1976, and 2001 censuses (the only censuses available where this information was recorded in a usable form.) The Gini scores (see Figures 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5) graphically show the amount of inequality in living space in the Cooks. The diagonal line (the upper boundary of the enclosed area) would be the line of perfect equality, where the cumulative percent of the population matches the cumulative percent of total number of rooms in houses on the island. The curved bottom line (the lower boundary of the enclosed area) is the actual plot of cumulative percent of the population to cumulative percent of the total number of rooms. The larger the enclosed area, the greater the divergence of the actual situation from what would be perfect equality. A shrinking enclosed area means shrinking inequality.

It is easy to see here that inequality has been decreasing—at least in terms of day-to-day living arrangements. Part of the reason for this is the siphoning off to New Zealand of the very well-to-do and the very poor. Another reason is the collapse of the sharp racial division of population under the protectorate administration,

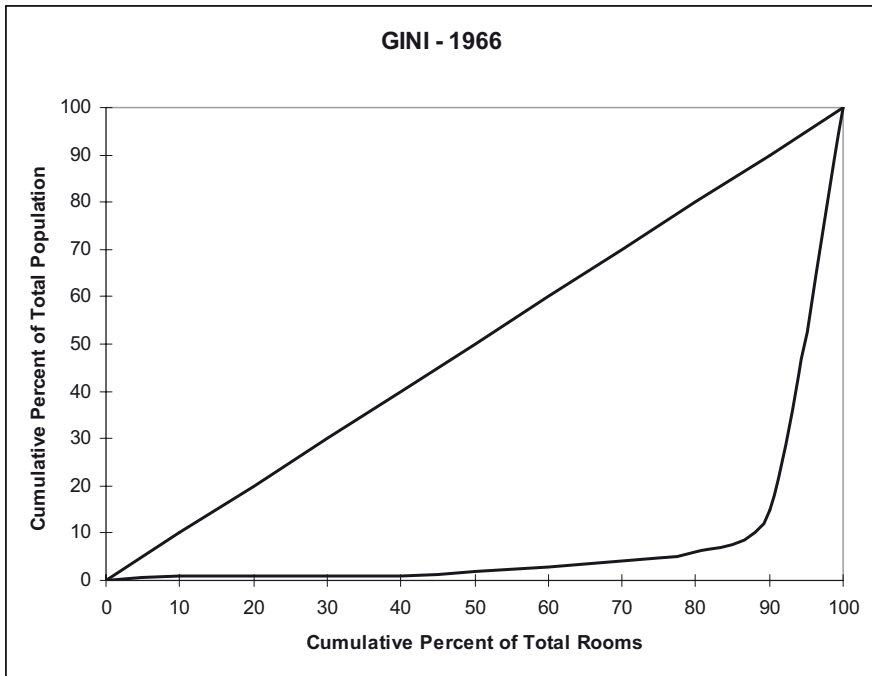


Figure 2.3 1966 Index of Inequality of Living Space

where only relatively few Maoris were admitted to the elite privileges of the white society.¹² And, finally, many traditional forms of hierarchical domination were much softened once population movement became possible.

In an article, “Poverty—what does it mean to the Cook Islanders?,” one local journalist points out the difficulty of determining what poverty means in a country that seems, at least on the surface, so wealthy. The Cook Islands economy would completely and instantaneously collapse without the millions of dollars of foreign aid that it receives each year (especially from New Zealand). But he writes (T. Pitt 2002, 12):

What may continue to be an obstacle to Government’s argument [for increased foreign aid] is the appearance of affluence in the Cook Islands, and its relatively high GDP per capita. The ADB [Asian Development Bank] for example, classifies the Cook Islands among a few Pacific Islands that are ‘economically advanced nations.’ Visitors to these shores also frequently comment about Rarotonga’s wealth in terms of the number of new vehicles, homes, roads, communications and other amenities.

12 For a compelling portrait of Cook Islands society during the era of the protectorate, see Scott 1991.

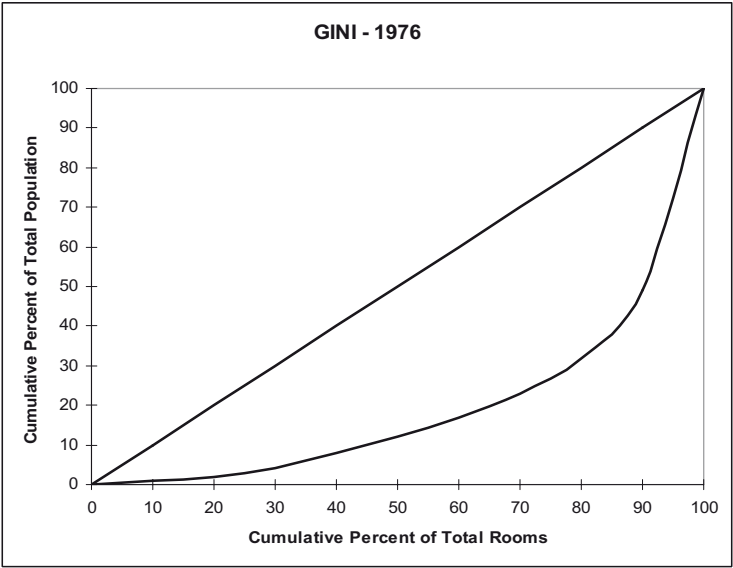


Figure 2.4 1976 Gini Index of Inequality of Living Space

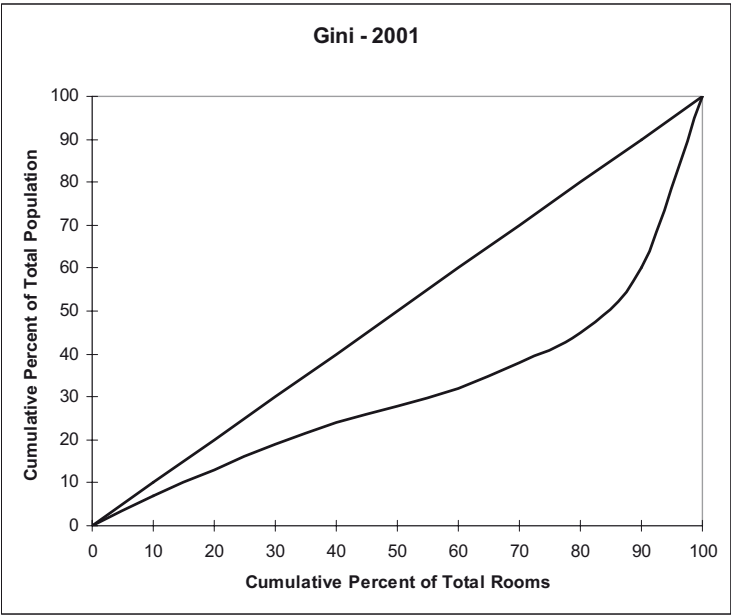


Figure 2.5 2001 Gini Index of Inequality of Living Space

“What poverty means” in the Cooks can be difficult to determine. The GDP per capita may be relatively high compared to other South Pacific nations, but many of the “lifestyle” problems associated with poverty run rampant through the Cooks. A front page article in the *Cook Islands News* called “Obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure—results of health checks” (Govmedia, 10 October 2002, 1) reported that a free health check given to women attending the National Women’s Conference “revealed many have problems ...” Fifty-eight percent of the women were obese, 26 percent were overweight, and only 14 percent were in the normal weight range. Seventy-nine percent of the women had high blood pressure and 15 percent were borderline. Also, “Fifty-two percent of the women checked were known diabetics, with 33 percent uncertain or unsure whether they had the disease.” This dovetails with an article in the *Cook Islands Herald* entitled “Bad lifestyles main health problem.” (Govmedia, 1 February 2003, 18) The article quotes Health Secretary Vaine Teokotai: “Our main problem isn’t things like the flu ...[I]t’s non-communicable diseases like high blood pressure and diabetes that are caused by eating too much, smoking too much, drinking too much alcohol and not exercising.” The article also reports on comments made by Prime Minister Dr Robert Woonton at the Cook Islands Health Conference in 2002.

[H]e found it ironic that while many people in the rest of the world were dying from lack of food, Cook Islanders were dying from eating too much. ‘Our enthusiasm for hospitality is killing us,’ he said. ‘When we entertain we like to load the food tables until they are sagging in the middle.’

As we have also seen, part of the problem is not only the quantity of food that the Cook Islanders eat, but the types of foods they eat. Prestige items are tinned corned beef smothered in fat, candy, and sugared soft drinks. All are imported, expensive, and unhealthy. The esteem with which these types of foods are regarded can be traced as far back as the European missionaries who denigrated the local diet of fish and fruit while putting forward their own salted beef and cabin bread.

The flattening of some types of inequality in the Cooks sets up a situation that in many ways parallels the story that DiMaggio (1982) tells of cultural entrepreneurship in nineteenth century Boston. Faced with the rapid economic rise of many of the immigrants (especially the Irish) to their world, the Boston Brahmins turned increasingly to their *cultural* capital as the marker of distinction upon which their high social status should rest. The Cooks likewise experienced a flattening of economic distinctions—just at the time, moreover, when material goods were becoming increasingly available and cash (from the tourism industry) was for the first time generally available to purchase those material goods. At the time of this study, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, some Cook Islanders, like Boston’s Brahmins, were avidly turning to culture and the arts to mark their position at the top of the status hierarchy. It is the reassertion of Maori culture and identity that is providing the impetus behind the most recent changes in Cook Islands culture.

The Resurgence of Indigeneity and Maori Rights

The airport on Rarotonga opening in 1974 also increasingly opened the Cooks to new ideas from abroad. Those New Zealand educated youth who *did* come back to the islands brought with them new understandings about the politics of indigenous rights and indigenous identity that they had learned from contact with activists and scholars engaged in the civil rights struggles spreading around the world.

The first political steps taken in this process, resulting in internal self-government, were quickly followed by cultural changes directed at infusing Cook Islands culture with a renaissance of respect for the traditional ideas, values and customs that had for so long been held somewhat in contempt. Crocombe (2001, 56) argues that: "Many people of multiple ancestry, for whom a primarily European identity was advantageous in the colonial era (or Japanese in Micronesia), shifted to a primarily indigenous identity since independence." Part of this shift is played out at the level of the most quotidian. For instance, one artist to whom I spoke has been progressively adding traditional Polynesian middle names to her very Anglo-Saxon sounding given name. As she says, "It's more politically correct to have a more Maori name." The resurgence of interest in tattoos is another aspect of this shift. There has also been an upsurge of interest in the Cook Islands Maori language. Programs to teach Cook Islands Maori have been set up in New Zealand. (Thompson 2002) In the Cooks themselves, the Ministry of Education is pushing to find more secondary school teachers who are versed in the Cook Islands language and traditional culture. The Ministry of Education's Director of Administration John Teao was quoted in the local paper as saying, "We need teachers who focus on Cook Islands Maori language to help with the fulfillment of secondary school positions in the future. ... It's important that we do continue Maori education ..." (Carr, 10 February 2003, 3) Another newspaper article, encouragingly entitled, "Begin speaking Rarotongan Maori," notes (Matenga 2003, 19) that "The best place to teach a child Maori is in the home and as early in life as possible." This is a sharp contrast from the days of missionary rule when children were severely punished for speaking Maori.

Culture and the arts, of course, play a central role in the resurgence of interest in traditional Cook Islands identity. Conflicts over the use of traditional symbols, the influx of tourist dollars aimed at purchases of arts and crafts (and the uneven distribution of those dollars), the tension between status based on *mana* and *taunga* standing versus status based on material possessions—all of these areas find expression in the Rarotongan art world. Art is inevitably tied to ideas of reasserting traditional values, attitudes, customs, and identities. The basis of status in the Cooks was once firmly grounded in genealogy and *mana*—now economic capital and material possessions have become available and, as kinship networks break down, these new markers of status vie with more traditional markers of prestige as ordering principles of the society. The changing economy, the changing population, and the opening of the Cooks to the processes of globalization have all destabilized the society with the result that, as in nineteenth century Boston, the cultural field has become a site of conflict and struggle for dominance. Identity

politics and the importance of ethnicity has become an important part of social conflict over gaining status. As we will see, control of cultural consumption, production, and, especially, evaluation is a site of intense conflict in the Cooks. The cultural field is a battleground and the players are well aware of the stakes: status, economic capital, identity, social legitimacy, and social dominance.

Artists' Experiences in New Zealand

The vast majority of artists on Rarotonga have lived and/or studied abroad, most often in New Zealand, but also in other countries around the Pacific such as French Polynesia. Many of the artists were born and educated in New Zealand and had their first exposure to the arts there. Those experiences were often formative for the artists, especially as some of the artists began to develop a political consciousness related to their ethnicity. One artist, now a sculptor, related the impact on him of getting special access to the collection of Cook Islands Maori artifacts in a museum in Auckland when he worked there as a university student. "Holding those carvings in my hands—feeling their power" influenced not only his desire to create art, but also his pride in his Cook Islands Maori heritage.

There was a certain tension between the pan-Pacific Maori identity, the New Zealand Maori identity, and the specifically Cook Islands Maori identity that was often a marginalized minority identity within the New Zealand Maori world. One artist noted how his own work was, in his early career, very much influenced by New Zealand Maori art, which he described as "darker—very political, very angry." His own artwork was also concerned with the oppression of the indigenous people. But he eventually felt the need to find his own Cook Islands identity and, after moving back to the Cooks as a young man, he began to work in a somewhat brighter, more specifically Cook Islands vein, referencing images and motifs specific, and especially significant, to the Cooks.

While the Cook Islands identity was often marginalized in New Zealand, not even experiences with New Zealand Maori identity were positive or empowering for the artists growing up there. An artist, raised in New Zealand of Cook Islands parents, recounted his experiences with his Maori identity in the school system:

I was in the top track in school, which didn't include art in middle school. That was for stupid kids, as was Maori language. My mate and I were the only Maori kids. I was taken for a New Zealand Maori. The Pacific islands didn't really have a presence then. We had to take either two languages or one language and something like accounting. So we asked if we could take Maori language, but were told that if we wanted to do that, we have to go right down all the way from 3A to 3H or something like that. I took French. Then in sixth form we were allowed to take art again.

Many of the artists who were born in the Cooks but sent to New Zealand to be educated found the transition extremely difficult. One painter, who arrived in New Zealand from Rarotonga at age 15 commented, “Every single thing was so foreign! So different from what we were used to. It was very hard to make the adjustment.” Another recounted how he would seek out his brothers in the dark after lights out in the school dormitory so that they could be with each other in the night, risking beatings from the school officials if they were caught together. Another artist said simply, “I never wanted to leave [Rarotonga].” He came back to the island as soon as he was able.

A few other artists who were born and raised in New Zealand, however, expressed the difficulties that they found in coming to the Cooks, especially in integrating themselves into the tightly-knit family structures that circumscribe the lives of young Rarotongans. Said one, who arrived in the Cooks for the first time as a young adult: “When we came here, it was very hard on me because it meant such a loss of my freedom. I was supposed to stop doing art and go get a job and then bring home the money and it gets shared out among everyone. I’m not going to do *that*!” This same artist noted the population drain in the islands, especially of young adults—“There’s no one in their 20s or 30s here” —owing to the onerous traditional life and familial expectations on Rarotonga. Family obligation, in fact, was often cited as the reason that some artists came (or came back) to the Cooks. One artist explained, “I didn’t want to come back here. But I’m the oldest son.”

Although a few of the artist on Rarotonga had been formally trained in the arts at the university level, for the most part arts education in New Zealand was haphazard at best. One sculptor, who grew up in a timber town, the child of working class parents, recalled his introduction to working with wood:

There were always nice pieces of wood around the town because of the timber industry. There was a communal woodpile—fuel wood—in the center of the town for everyone’s use. We used to get these really beautiful pieces of wood there. I started doing what you would call whittling, just carving up the wood. There was only one other kid in town who did it. He showed me how.

In the school system itself, there was little emphasis on art and the artists themselves sometimes found what art education there was to be uninspiring. Said one, “It was boring. I just wasn’t interested. The teacher was more into art history, which I hated. He wore this tweed jacket and you could just smell the pipe tobacco on him.” Another artist started taking art classes in the fourth form only as a way “to get out of taking French.”

Like the artists who grew up in the Cooks, some of the artists who were exposed to the arts in the New Zealand educational system nevertheless consider themselves to be self-taught. One artist who began her career by screen-printing t-shirts after watching some flatmates doing so said, “I thought, ‘I can do that.’ I’m self-taught. I learned it the hard way, just experimenting and figuring it out for myself—buying cheap material.” Other artists, however, pointed to specific teachers who inspired

and helped them, especially by providing role models of how to be an artist in a society where that occupation was viewed with a combination of suspicion, hostility and disdain. One male artist remembers being especially inspired by art teacher in sixth form because the teacher was very masculine—a champion rugby player and also an artist. “I remember not so much what he taught, but the *way* he approached the artworks—getting the students to feel comfortable enough to express themselves artistically and to explore and experiment.”

The most important similarity between those artists raised and educated in New Zealand and those raised and educated in the Cooks is that, in both societies, there was little emphasis on arts education in the schools and little conception of the possibility of fine arts as a possible career after graduation. One difference, however, was that the politicization of the New Zealand Maoris influenced the development of a consciousness of the importance of ethnic identity as an important component of the artworks themselves for those Cook Islands artists who were raised and educated in New Zealand. This dovetails with, in general, the dislocating experience of moving back and forth between the Cooks and New Zealand (as well as other countries). These dislocations themselves again served to heighten awareness of Maori ethnic identity and to bring to the fore issues surrounding the legitimacy of that identity that, in Chapter 4, we will see played out in very raw terms within the Rarotongan art world.

Pan-Polynesian Processes

The many islands of Polynesia have unique and varied histories. Even within the Cooks themselves, individual islands have not only distinctive cultures, but also distinctive historical experiences that have been important to their development. Nevertheless, there are some similarities across the islands of Polynesia and Rarotongans share with other Polynesians both cultural elements and historical experiences that bind them together.

By 1000 CE, according to Crocombe (2001, 47), “all significant inhabitable land in Oceania had been occupied.” The Proto-Polynesians who spread across this vast swath of ocean carried the concepts of “mana” and “tapu” with them, accounting for their widespread currency throughout the region. Tuggle (1979) argues that the social division between chiefs and commoners was part of the “basic Polynesian cultural pattern,” along with a farming-fishing economy and a conical-clan social structure. Kirch (1979, 295–6) notes the importance of extended kinship networks throughout the region:

The extended family groups, such as the Futunan *kainga*, the Samoan *‘ainga*, or the Anutan *patongia*, serve other social purposes. They are units for ownership and transmission of major property, including arable land, houses, crops, food in general, pigs, and other items of material culture (canoes, food bowls, mats, and the like). Individuals have rights of use through their affiliation with household

and larger social groups, but it is the group, not the individual, through which property is transmitted.

The ethos expressed through myths and story-telling are distinctive to each island, of course, and often express the individual challenges and stresses imposed upon the cultures by the particular local environments. Nevertheless, Poignant (1967, 68–9) points out the “evident homogeneity of mythological themes, in spite of separation of island groups from each other in both time and distance.” For example, the story of the noble and *generous* Tawhaki is widespread throughout Polynesia, appearing in the mythology of almost every island group, including New Zealand, the Tuamotus, Rarotonga, Tahiti and Hawaii. Echoing the ideas of the valor inherent in generosity, the negative valuation of the emotion of envy, and the social sanction of exclusion from the group, Poignant (1967, 66) tells us that:

Even as a child Tawhaki’s nobility and generosity was evident, and as is often the case this aroused envy. The Tahitians said that his cousins, the children of Puna, could not abide the way his toy canoes won every race. They beat him until they thought they had killed him, and left him on the beach. The forbearing Tawhaki got up and followed them home and did not even complain to his mother. Much later, when the opportunity presented itself, he simply turned them into porpoises.

Although the individual islands produced distinctive artistic styles, so that the differences between wooden figures carved on Rarotonga versus those carved on Aitutaki (one of the nearest neighbors) are readily apparent, nevertheless there are general types of art that were practiced on islands across Polynesia. Tattooing spanned the entire triangle from New Zealand to Rapa Nui to Hawaii. Tapa making and fine weaving were almost as widespread.

Initial contact with European explorers, traders and missionaries began with Magellan’s first expedition through the Pacific in 1521. But it wasn’t until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that contact with Westerners became regular and sustained. The first missionaries from the London Missionary Society arrived in Tahiti at the very end of the eighteenth century. In 1817, John Williams, who played such an important role in the conversion of the Cooks to Christianity, arrived in Tahiti. For the next twenty years, until his death on Erromango in 1839, he worked converting the islanders throughout Polynesia to Christianity and setting up systems so that native converts would also travel the area proselytizing.

As in the Cooks, the traders (including slave traders), explorers, and missionaries throughout the Pacific brought disease and decimation to many of the indigenous people. And throughout Polynesia, the attacks by missionaries on traditional cultural practices, coupled with the local people’s often eager adoption of new technologies brought by the outsiders, meant that the traditional ways—arts, customs, religion—frequently disappeared, or at least diminished.

Table 2.2 Dates of Colonization and Independence Across Polynesia

Country	Date First Annexed or Colonized	Date (if any) of Independence
Cook Islands	1888	1965 (Internal self-government in association with New Zealand)
Easter Islands	1888	Department of Chile
French Polynesia	1843	1984 (Internal self-governance in association with France)
Hawaii	1898	State of the USA
New Zealand	1840	1907
Niue	1900	1974 (Internal self-governance in association with New Zealand)
Samoa	1899	1962
American Samoa	1900	Territory of USA
Tokelau	1889	Incorporated into New Zealand
Tonga	1900	1970
Tuvalu	1892	1978
Wallis and Futuna	1842	Territory of France

Source: Crocombe 2001, 684–204

Over a 60 year period, from 1840 to 1900, as happened in the Cooks, most of the islands of Polynesia were annexed or colonized by the colonial powers of Europe and North America. (see Table 2.2)

As in the Cooks, annexation and/or colonization often negatively affected the traditional culture. The loss of indigenous language, for example, occurred throughout Polynesia and continues today. The Maori Language Commission poll conducted in 1995 found that only eight percent of Maoris speak a Maori language. (Crocombe 2001, 107) Under conditions of colonial rule, it was often advantageous for indigenous people—especially those who could claim mixed ethnic heritage—to identify with the dominant colonial group. With the wave of independence movements that began in the 1960s, the situation throughout Polynesia reversed and those who had formerly identified with the colonial powers now made the most of their indigenous identities. Crocombe (2001, 128–30) argues that:

Multiple origins provide options that can be prioritized according to expected benefits in particular contexts. ... Humans identify with those from whom they have the most to gain, so with the coming of independence, the advantage for those of multiple heritage swung to identifying with the new indigenous power elite. Many Samoan part-Europeans sought chiefly titles, adopted Samoan names, began wearing Samoan clothes, and participated in Samoan traditional life ... Sir Joseph Rabukawaqa noted that almost all Fijians in cabinet were part-

foreign, and some of the first ministers had, before independence, gone by their European surnames.

This fluidity is indicative of a pan-Polynesian indigenous cultural revival that began in the second half of the twentieth century and really gained steam with the first South Pacific Festival of the arts, held in Suva, Fiji, in 1972. Utanga and Mangos (2006, 321) note that:

the intention of the festival was very clear, to fight against the disappearance of traditional arts and culture in the South Pacific, in the face of the overwhelming presence of European culture and values. At the same time the festival would encourage the preservation of indigenous art forms to give them new currency in the modern era ...

This cultural revival, tied to the indigenous rights movements sweeping not only the Pacific, but the whole globe, was also tied to contentious issues of cultural intellectual property rights, which we will see played out in great detail in Chapter 4.

Finally, post-independence economic changes that are seen in the Cooks had their counterparts in many countries of Polynesia. The increase in tourism is a region-wide phenomenon, although with varying impacts on different islands. Tourism is among the largest sources of income for not only the Cook Islands, but also Easter Island, Fiji, French Polynesia, Hawaii, New Zealand, Niue, and Tonga. The relative ease of international air travel no doubt played an important role in the post-World War II tourist boom in the Pacific. And, again as happened in the Cooks, the ease of travel facilitated movement of people *out* of the country as well as into it. The effects of emigration are increasingly pronounced throughout Polynesia, leading to the creation of MIRAB (Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy) economies. Anglim (1993, 149) writes: “Migration and mobility are characteristics of island life, but the impact of population loss, separation of families and the loosening of community responsibilities is only now being highlighted.” (See Syed and Mataio 1993 or Quanchi and Adams 1993 for further discussion of the MIRAB effect.) The processes discussed in this chapter are outcomes of the unique history of Rarotonga, but there are often similarities across Polynesia for some aspects of these processes. Although this study is largely concerned with one island among the many that make up Polynesia, many of the issues faced by Rarotongans, especially as they relate to culture, are of much wider interest.

Culture is fluid—cultural consumption and production are tied to both traditional Cook Islands life and to progress in the modern world, where cultural capital is tied in somewhat complicated ways to economic success on one hand and to prestige on the other. In the next chapter, we will look at ideas about the connections between cultural, economic, and symbolic capital and will examine the construction of the contemporary Rarotongan art market and how all the issues of the changing nature of life in the Cook Islands are being played out across the

canvas of the art world. These large scale forces will play an important role in shaping the way in which creativity is expressed at the level of the individual.

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Chapter 3

Developing an Art Market at Home and Abroad

Almost two centuries after Cook Islanders first traded carvings of their erstwhile gods to the missionaries who coveted them as souvenirs and curios, the art market on Rarotonga emerged into maturity. It developed within a context of social relations and outside forces that shaped the way in which not only the art market developed, but also the way in which discussions relating to issues of ethnic legitimacy, identity politics, intellectual property rights, status and honor came to play a part in the creation of the art world. As Becker (1982, 310–11) writes, “To understand the birth of new art worlds, then, we need to understand, not the genesis of innovations, but rather the process of mobilizing people to join in a cooperative activity on a regular basis.” One useful way of looking at change and development in the Rarotongan art world—and in Rarotongan society at large—is to examine the ways in which different types of capital come into play, especially (as we will see in the next chapter) the ways some Cook Islanders attempt to use economic capital as a marker of symbolic capital and (in this chapter) how a body of cultural capital tied to social capital is being legitimated as central to the Rarotongan status hierarchy. Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptions of different types of capital are helpful for understanding the context within which the art world developed and the communal forces shaping it.

Types of Capital—Economic, Cultural, Social, and Symbolic

Capital is distinguished from other types of possessions by its *usefulness*. Capital is used, for example, to start businesses and keep them going. This is the most common conception of capital—economic capital that is used to produce, ultimately, economic gain. But Bourdieu extends this conception of capital to encompass a much larger portion of social life. There are, he argues, other types of capital—including cultural, social, and symbolic capitals. These types of capital, like economic capital, are useful; they are used to generate gain. They are also, again like economic capital, useful as social weapons, as ways of asserting or maintaining dominance over others, as ways of making invidious distinctions. Bourdieu writes (1986, 245–6): “Thus the capital ... depends for its efficacy on ... competition between [an agent] and the other possessors of capital competing for the same goods, in which scarcity—and through it social value—is generated.” Command of artistic production and consumption is part of this.

Cultural capital is the body of ideas, knowledge, attitudes, and tastes which a person uses to claim distinction within a society. All people possess cultural capital of some sort, but only some types of cultural capital are accorded esteem within the larger society. Just *which* types are esteemed is precisely a site of conflict and competition within the society. *Whose* ideas, knowledge, attitudes and tastes will dominate the society and, therefore, legitimate and confer prestige upon their possessors? As Bourdieu (1986, 246) notes:

However, it should not be forgotten that [cultural capital] exists as symbolically and materially active effective capital only insofar as it is appropriated by agents and implemented and invested as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which go on in the fields of cultural production (the artistic field, the scientific field, etc.) and, beyond them, in the field of social classes ...

As briefly discussed in Chapter 2, Paul DiMaggio (1982) provides an extremely enlightening example of this process in action in his study of the formation of high culture institutions in nineteenth century Boston, where the dominant status of traditional elites was under attack by the rising numbers of financially successful immigrants—especially the Irish. Money alone (that is, economic capital) could no longer provide distinction to the Brahmin class once the newer arrivals began to succeed economically. The traditional elites turned to culture in order to maintain invidious distinctions. High culture institutions, particularly the Museum of Fine Arts and the Boston Symphony Orchestra were set up, DiMaggio argues, with the intent of maintaining the status quo with social stratification now based on command of culture, especially a new definition of high culture, rather than on mere possession of money. This was a doubly effective strategy for the Brahmins' purposes because, as Veblen (1994) points out, while money by its very nature as a transferable asset can be acquired by anyone, culture takes time to learn and can only be acquired by a select group of "cultural insiders." This is because of the mutability of meaning attached to the attitudes, tastes, and so on, that comprise cultural capital. In short, what counts as "good" culture can be shifted over time as necessary (see, for example, Levine 1984 and 1988). As elites set up cultural institutions to socially enshrine certain artistic productions as worthy of acclaim and, by extension, other productions as objects of disdain, elites become taste makers. DiMaggio argues that in many ways the purpose of the Museum of Fine Arts and the Boston Symphony Orchestra was to educate the masses to stand in awe of culture as chosen by the traditional elites, but not to be able to command it. Rather, the newcomers to economic prosperity were meant to learn precisely that they *did not* and *could not* command high culture. School children are taken on museum field trips not to learn that they too can produce, consume, or control high culture, but instead to learn that they *cannot*.

This state of affairs was not unique to nineteenth century Boston. In her study of Viennese cultural politics a century earlier, DiNora (1995, 37, emphasis added) found that, "Eighteenth century music patronage was born of ... fashion

and *one-upmanship* as often as it was of ‘inordinate love and knowledge’.” Likewise, White (1993, 21–2) argues that in industrializing England, the rising bourgeoisie patronized the artists of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as an act of class conflict:

In this Victorian context a new class was stirring; it was moved to seek identities in and through new interpretations of art, as much as in specific new artworks or styles. ... The Pre-Raphaelites thus are an example of the awkward process by which the ‘middle class’ was trying to come into existence, by constructive self-discovery, in Victorian England. ... Individualism became the central new myth.

White is even more explicit (1993, 5) in his general comment about the uses of the arts in general: “Do the arts and their works sustain invidious hierarchy in general? ... Beyond simple tribes, ostentation seems commonly to be at the root of art. Ostentation is the format of social ordering.”

The situation on Rarotonga is surprising similar to the situation that DiMaggio saw in nineteenth century Boston. The changes in the economy, especially the massive influx of tourist dollars and the large-scale movement of outer-islanders to Rarotonga in search of work, means that traditional elites could see a serious slipping away of their status as economic capital takes over from older ideas (such as *mana* or *taunga* standing) as the basis of high status. This scenario is made even more complicated by the rising political tide of indigenous rights movements, as we will see in detail in the next chapter. It is no accident that this is the moment when Rarotongans, for the first time, have begun to see their cultural productions as high art. The command of cultural capital is becoming a struggle on Rarotonga of individuals to gain a dominant position in the newly ordered social hierarchy.

Cultural capital is inevitably tied to symbolic capital. Symbolic capital, Bourdieu argues, is the child of cultural capital—the result of legitimation in the cultural sphere:

Because the social conditions of [cultural capital’s] transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital, it is predisposed to function as symbolic capital, i.e., to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence, as authority exerting an effect of (mis)recognition ... Furthermore, the specifically symbolic logic of distinction additionally secures material and symbolic profits for the possessors of a large cultural capital; any given cultural competence (e.g., being able to read in a world of illiterates) derives a scarcity value from its position in the distribution of cultural capital and yields profits of distinction for its owner. (1986, 245)

“*Taunga** status,” for example, while habitually read as an attribute of the individual, is a social construction in myriad ways—from the selection of some activities to be valorized (while other activities are ignored or disdained) to the

opportunity to master those activities afforded individuals based on their class, gender, family of origin and even ethnicity. It is not that those who have achieved taunga status are in any way fraudulent. It is simply that, regardless of any inborn abilities or talents, not everyone is equally allowed to pursue the fulfillment of those abilities and talents. Not all talent is nurtured; much is neglected. Social factors play an important role in deciding which is which.

The efficacy of cultural and symbolic capital as markers of distinction within the status hierarchy would be impossible without the use of social capital—that it, without the use of social ties between individuals and groups. Maintaining solidarity in groups is a key factor in transforming cultural and symbolic capital into social power. Bourdieu writes (1986, 248–9):

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.

Like other types of capital, social capital gets power through scarcity. “Through the introduction of new members into a family, a clan, or a club, the whole definition of the group, i.e., its fines, its boundaries, and its identity, is put at stake, exposed to redefinition, alteration, adulteration.” (1986, 249) Possessors of powerful or useful social capital have a strong interest in keeping others out of the group or network. In Rarotonga, this is especially true of ethnic groups. Where, once, membership in the “white” or “European” race was rigidly policed, a shifting of symbolic prominence towards indigeneity has meant a reevaluation of which groups attempt to preserve (or induce) a scarcity of members. One of the most hotly debated issues on Rarotonga now may be the question of “Who is *really* Maori?” For example, several peeved responses appeared in the “Smoke Signals” and “Letters” columns of the *Cook Islands News* when Professor Ron Crocombe¹ referred to some attendees at a political reform meeting as “expatriate businessmen” and portrayed them as a small and closed group wielding inordinate power in Cook Islands politics (Crocombe 2002, 4).² Letter after letter vilified and upbraided

1 Ron Crocombe is a Professor Emeritus of the University of the South Pacific, the founding professor of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific, and founding director of the Institute of Pacific Studies at USP. A prolific author in Pacific Studies and an authority on Pacific cultures, he is also a resident of Rarotonga and married to a Rarotongan, Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe [née Hoskings], herself a scholar and translator of early Rarotongan writings into English.

2 One anonymous writer in the Smoke Signals column, referring to two of the original chiefs who settled Rarotonga, chides: “...if Tangiia went back to Tahiti, Karika to Samoa, and all the outer islanders to their respective islands we will be left with just Crocombe and

Crocombe for his views on who is or is not a “true” Cook Islander; he had clearly hit a nerve. Mixing issues of ethnic identity with politics was guaranteed to ignite controversy. The response to Crocombe’s comment, however, does not begin to compare to the furor over “expatriate art” that will be discussed in Chapter 4. Art, in fact, provides a particularly fertile field for competition over identity, for, as White (1993, 17) writes, “... performances and artworks can reflect compulsions to assert identity even against what seems common sense, against ‘reality’. Elsewheres and elsewhens become important venues for claiming identities.”

Alfred Gell’s work (1998) provides insights into this larger question: *why* do art objects exist? “Aesthetic judgments,” he writes (1998, 3),

are only interior mental acts; art objects, on the other hand, are produced and circulated in the external physical and social world. This production and circulation has to be sustained by certain social processes of an objective kind, which are connected to other social processes (exchange, politics, religion, kinship, etc.

It is the *social* interaction, Gell argues, among all art world actors (including the art objects themselves) that makes art a subject matter for social scientists and that makes social scientific discussions of art worthwhile. He writes:

My view is that in so far as anthropology has a specific subject-matter at all, that subject-matter is ‘social relationships’—relationships between participants in social systems of various kinds. ... Similarly, the anthropology of art cannot be the study of aesthetic principles of this or that culture, but of the mobilization of aesthetic principles (or something like them) in the course of social interaction. (1998, 4)

Gell argues that “things,” like art objects, can be social agents—that is, they can act on others (“patients”) so that the others are causally affected by the agent’s action. The initial example Gell gives (1998, 18–19) to explain objects as agents is of his car:

For example, I possess a Toyota which I esteem rather than abjectly love, but since Toyotas are ‘sensible’ and rather dispassionate cars, my Toyota does not mind (it is, after all, Japanese—cars have distinct ethnicities) ... My Toyota is reliable and considerate; it only breaks down in relatively minor ways at times when it ‘knows’ that no great inconvenience will result. If, God forbid, my Toyota were to break down in the middle of the night, far from home, I should consider this an act of gross treachery for which I would hold the car personally and morally culpable, not myself or the garage mechanics who service it. Rationally, I know

no need for the political reform! Down side, [his wife] Marge will have to go as she is a Hosking and Hosking is an expatriate!” (n.a. 11 October 2002, 5)

that such sentiments are somewhat bizarre, but I also know that 90 percent of car owners attribute personality to their cars in much the same way that I do.

Art objects can also function as agents, as can artists, recipients of artworks, and the prototypes, or models, on which the artworks are based. And each of these actors can also be the “patient” at the receiving end of the agency of another (1998, 29). So, for example, an artist may exercise agency over the artwork (“index”) in that the appearance of the artwork is shaped by the will of the artist. This is the “everyday” conception of the relation between the artist and the artwork, especially in the Romantic conception of artist-as-genius. Gell argues though, that the interactions among actors in the art world are not as simple as we may first imagine. The index may also exert agency over the artist. For example, “the material [of the index—stone, canvas and paint, wood, and so on] inherently dictates to the artist the form it assumes.” (1998, 29) The index also exerts agency over the recipients (that is, the audience for the artworks) in that the recipient “as ‘spectator’ submits to the index.” The viewer of an art object, in this formulation, is a passive spectator of the index. This is closely tied to the idea of artist as agent and recipient as patient. Gell writes (1998, 29) that the recipient’s response is “dictated by artist’s skill, wit, magical powers, etc. Recipient captivated.”

Recipients of artworks, whether as patrons, buyers, audiences, or critics, also exert agency over both artists and artworks. Recipients can be patrons of artists and thereby *cause* the artist to create work. As audiences, buyers, and critics, the response of the recipients to the artworks, especially over time, *cause* the form of the artwork. We saw this in Chapter 2 when the adze-makers of Mangaia gradually changed the form of the adze handles in response to missionary demands for more spectacular “curios.” This leaves aside the very profound ways in which viewers of artworks *cause* them by causing their meaning through their (the viewers’) interpretive actions.

In these and other ways, Gell argues, art works (indices) are actors—agents and patients—in the world of social relations. Gell notes (1998, 37), however,

The pivot of the art nexus is always the index. The index, however, is never, or at least rarely, a ‘primary’ agent (or patient). The index is just the ‘disturbance’ in the causal milieu which reveals, and potentiates, agency exercised and patient-hood suffered on either side of it—by the primary agents, by recipients (patrons and spectators), by artists, and to a lesser extent, prototypes. The index is articulated in the causal milieu, whereas intentional agency and patient-hood somehow lie just outside it.

It is the ways in which artworks activate a series of relations among the artists and recipients surrounding the artwork that is important.

The connection here with Bourdieu’s ideas of struggles by actors within the field (*champ*) is fairly obvious. In Bourdieu’s conception, actors in a field (such as the artistic field) struggle against each other to achieve dominant positions.

These actors, using the various types of capital at their command, seek to rise above other actors in the relation-space of the field so as to achieve autonomy, prestige, and power. The movements of one actor in the field affect the status of all others in the field. That is, if one artist from Rarotonga were to be awarded a one-person show at, say, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, that achievement would affect all the other artists in the field. On the island, other Rarotongan artists would probably become “lesser,” while in the global art world as a whole, Rarotongan art (and artists) would probably become “greater.” Other Rarotongan artists would see their own status change (going down locally, but up internationally) through the relational logic of competition in the field. This happens to those other artists without any “action” on their part. They are “patients” of the MOMA-showing artist’s agency. Likewise, patrons of the MOMA-showing artist have been validated—their “taste” legitimated to the degree that MOMA is accepted as a legitimate source of prestige. Other local patrons, in the logic of the struggle in the field, may attempt to invalidate the prestige given by MOMA (denigrating it as a *papa’a* institution at odds in every way with the values and ideals of Maori society) as a way of preventing their own prestige from suffering the relative decline associated with not having backed the MOMA-showing artist, but having supported other artists instead. Bourdieu argues that strategies of “subversion” within the field are exactly attempts of this kind—attempts to replace one set of rules for legitimating high status within the field (such as showing at internationally known museums) with rules of another kind (being true, perhaps, to traditional Maori artistic and social principles.)

The fields are nested, in what Bourdieu calls “field homologies,” so that actors in dominant or subordinate positions in one field tend to be matched with analogous actors in other fields. High status attorneys have high status clients, for example. Moreover, a dominant position in one field may lead to a dominant position in another field (such as ties between the fields of politics and the military) and these dominant positions in small fields may lead to dominant positions in the overarching field or power. Subordinate positions, too, trace themselves through the nested fields so that they ultimately determine the actors’ subordinate positions within the field of power.

For this reason, arguments over, for example, stylistic issues in the art world can command a ferocity that seems out of proportion only when we fail to realize the larger stakes involved. The artworks, Gell contends, are parts of “distributed persons.” He writes (1998, 123):

That is to say ‘social agents’ can be drawn from categories which are as different as chalk and cheese (in fact, rather more different) because ‘social agency’ is not defined in terms of ‘basic’ biological attributes (such as inanimate thing vs. incarnate person) but is relational—it does not matter, in ascribing ‘social agent’ status, what a thing (or a person) ‘is’ in itself; what matters is where it stands in a network of social relations.

That is, an artwork (because it is the vehicle for invidious evaluations of artists and, therefore, patrons, buyers, and so on) is an actor in the relational struggles within the field—not only the field of art, but also the larger field of power. The piece of art that I hang on my wall is part of my social being and connects me to struggles over power, prestige, status, autonomy, and other social goods.

The role of art in the status hierarchy on Rarotonga—whether as part of cultural, symbolic, social, or even economic capital—is relatively new. Not so many years ago, although there were artists, there was no “art world” as such, with its integral apparatus of judgment and claims to distinction. Despite an incredibly rich heritage of cultural production, the acknowledgment of high art on Rarotonga has been created whole cloth almost entirely within the last decade. In its creation, we can see the formation of the structures within which current artists are working.

Making a Local Market

“There was no art scene when we arrived ten years ago,” one artist told me. That, succinctly, sums up the view of almost everyone whom I interviewed. Despite the production of carving, weaving, *tivaevae*, and even the existence of a few expatriate painters who used the Cooks as the source of imagery for their work sold overseas, an “art scene” in the sense of a producers, consumers, and suppliers functioning together as an art world in Becker’s sense, did not exist on Rarotonga a decade or two ago. Even most of the handicrafts for sale on the island were produced elsewhere. While a tiny handful of indigenous artists were at work on the island, without any supporting infrastructure of an art world, it was impossible to make a living with art or to pursue it more than part time. The few gallery/craft/curio shops in existence were not yet handling fine art by indigenous artists. As one gallery owner remembered, “There was no art here—absolutely none—when I came back in the early ’90s. Art was always supposed to be part of [the gallery], but we just weren’t doing anything with it. There were some dreadful carvings from Bali and I said, ‘All of these have to go.’” In this comment, note how the definition of what can be called “art” has changed over the past ten years. “Dreadful carvings from Bali” functioned as art ten years ago, but do not do so now.

Other important parts of a functioning art world were also absent from the island. One painter told me how even obtaining the raw materials for creating art was almost impossible. Her earliest paintings were made with tire paint and lipstick for lack of other options. A long time resident of the island who was somewhat skeptical of this bleak picture inadvertently confirmed the lack of resources in an attempt to refute the lipstick story:

You want to take the things that the artists say with a grain of salt. We all like to build ourselves up to be something heroic and talk about the enormous difficulties that we've overcome. There was certainly paint available on the island—CITC [The Cook Islands Trading Company—the largest local general store] had at least ten different colors for painting houses.

This comment in fact only underscores the difficulties artists faced in obtaining appropriate materials.

Although the difficulties and expense of transporting luxury items across the ocean explain to some degree the lack of art materials, perhaps the most compelling explanation for it is that the *idea* of a market for fine art was an innovative thought that had yet to reach the shores of Rarotonga. The owner of what eventually evolved into the first true art gallery on the island discussed why the shop originally carried no art works: "Well there wasn't the space for it and, to tell you the truth, the idea just never crossed my mind." The development of an art world, much like the creation of art works themselves, is an innovative act that requires somewhat breaking with traditional ideas and usual ways of doing things—and usual ways of thinking about things.³

Part of the reason that the development of an art world on Rarotonga seemed so foreign had to do with the way art was handled in the schools, a leftover from the days of missionary education when indigenous culture was denigrated. A 16-year resident of the island whose children all attended the local schools noted that when her family arrived, "There was no art education then—still isn't, although with Ian [George, the new head of arts education for the Cook Islands Ministry of Education] things may be changing." A native Rarotongan concurs, "There was no art education in the schools—the kids were having to do it by correspondence. There was no art curriculum, there was no art tutor. Now Ian George is here and he is putting something in place." George, a New Zealand-born and -educated artist of Cook Islands descent, first arrived on Rarotonga in the 1980s and settled on the island permanently in the 1990s. While pursuing his own career as a painter and sculptor, he has also been at the forefront of the establishment of an art world on Rarotonga by his work as, among other roles, director of arts education in the schools. Simultaneously, his participation in a number of pan-Pacific arts organizations has meant an increasing Rarotongan presence and engagement in cultural and artistic discussions across the region. Nevertheless, other artists on the island see a continuing lack of seriousness with regard to art education. "Art education in the schools is like rain in the Sahara Desert," says one local-born

3 A wide variety of contemporary indigenous art had not usually been displayed on the walls of Cook Islanders' homes. One of the artists whom I interviewed described the art commonly seen on the walls of her relatives' houses: "Gauguin prints, some nice [pieces by an older Cook Islands painter] —sunsets and palm trees and things—maybe [an expatriate artist who worked on Rarotonga decades ago.]"

artist. “When there is someone around to teach, they have art; when there isn’t, they don’t.”

Given these entrenched ideas about art, it is a wonder that an art scene ever developed at all. Two factors seem to be most responsible for the initial impulse, both of them social. The first is the movement of Cook Islanders away from the country; the second is the return of Cook Islanders, especially educated Cook Islanders, back to the island.

One of the longest practicing of the local artists began her arts career making silk screened clothes for Cook Islanders who moved overseas following the opening of the airport in 1974. “There were no tourists then,” she explained, explicitly tying artistic production to the existence of a market of buyers.

All the people here were leaving to go to New Zealand. We made the clothes for them with the tiare maori* on them for the people in New Zealand. They were homesick. We were the only people doing it then. Then we started to get orders from all over the world. [Another purveyor of island clothing] saw the fortune that was to be made because we had no competition, so he opened a business. They found it was cheaper just to tie-dye the pareu*—three buckets, dip the material in—zip, zip, zip—and then leave it in the sun. That’s what they do now. This way [screen printing] costs too much.

In this way, the movement of the population directly contributed to the beginnings of the art market.

But tying artistic production to the presence of a viable market of paying consumers has had an effect on the cultural life of the island. Once local producers found the “fortune that was to be made,” they became less willing to produce cultural forms without economic incentives to do so. An artist who arrived on the island shortly after the opening of the airport noted that when she first came, “You used to find the titi [part of the traditional costume for dancing, constructed from leaves, bark, or flowers] on the beach all the time. Now you never do. When we came there were like 22 dance troupes on the island—any excuse for dancing, a string band. Now there are only like three troupes and you have to go to the hotels to see them.”⁴ The lure of economic gain in exchange for cultural production harks back to the very earliest trade in carved idol “curios” for Europeans. The difference here, however, is that while the idol carvings were kept alive and even encouraged by the tourist trade after the conversion to Christianity, the number of dance troupes *declined* when professional dancing became an activity performed chiefly for tourists.

4 At a CINVAS* meeting that I attended, one member announced that an opportunity might arise for local artists to produce images for a series of postage stamps that the government was considering issuing featuring Cook Islands art. The first comment made in response was, “How much will we be paid?” Questions of monetary compensation dominated the entire discussion of the stamps.

While the movement out of native Cook Islanders may have helped in the initial stages of the birth of the art market, population movement also worked in the creation of the Cook Islands art world in the other direction, with Cook Islanders—or those of Cook Islands ancestry—coming back to the island and bringing with them cultural understanding imported from the outside world, especially from New Zealand, where many Cook Islanders were educated. In many ways, this population was very conscious of trying to establish a new cultural milieu. Says one returning Cook Islander who came back to Rarotonga after university in New Zealand, “There is a very, *very* minuscule group of people who have chosen to come here or come back here after being out in the world and being educated. And we are trying to change this society.” This group of people faced, very knowingly, an uphill battle with regard to changing entrenched attitudes about art and culture. One painter, now very successful, recalled her early frustrations: “[My extended family] didn’t understand or appreciate what I was doing. And sometimes I did think, ‘I might as well go down and get a job at the Edgewater [a large tourist resort] and make everyone happy.’ But I didn’t want to do that.”

The artists frequently discussed how family members discouraged their pursuit of art, either actively (“Doing art is something to be ashamed of—there is a word for it, ‘*aniu*,’”^{*} said one) or simply out of ignorance that such a career choice was available. An artist who began her career later in life and after moving away from her family said, “If I’d told my mum that I was going to be an artist, she would never have heard of something like that. It’s the same everywhere, with most families.” Given the importance of family and of extended kin networks in the Cooks, it is important to note that in these cases, it was necessary for the artist to break away from the close-knit kinship network—at least somewhat—in order to pursue a career as an artist. In my interviews, in general the more traditional the family background of the artist, the more likely this was to be the case.

Several of the interviewees placed the true beginning of contemporary Cook Islands art world with a group show put together in 1998 by Ian George after his arrival to the Cooks from New Zealand. “That was the beginning of contemporary Cook Islands art,” says one of the artists who exhibited art for the first time in the Cooks in that show. Over and over again, interviewees cited the “confidence” of the returnees as the key ingredient to spark the beginning of the artistic fire. The “group” aspect of the show may have been especially important, given the cultural emphasis on collectivity, in overcoming some of the barriers to displaying art works as fine art. Regarding that first group show, one artist and gallery owner said, “Lots of the artists just didn’t have the confidence to have a show by themselves. Like [a painter currently working on the island] —I’m trying to convince her to show her stuff, but she won’t. So maybe in a group show she will.” Another gallery owner who has been very active in encouraging local artists to participate in the formal art market also referenced confidence and comfort as import aspects for initiating Cook Islanders into the art world. “That’s why I wanted a gallery like this—not one of those ones with white walls that you’re afraid to go into.”

As this comment shows, not only art producers, but also art consumers had to be initiated gently into the mysteries of the art world. Despite these efforts, many of the artists expressed frustration with the reception that they receive from the local populace. Said one, "I've stopped expecting local people to appreciate what I do." In Bourdieuan terms, the cultural capital of the art world has not yet been valorized as symbolic capital. "Artist" is not yet "taunga." In fact, when I was discussing my research with a local man who is not part of the art world, he cut me off emphatically, stating, "There *is no* Cook Islands art." I mentioned carving and tivaevae and he said, "But we don't consider those art."

Part of the job of the art world, especially gallery owners, is to create a conception of art in the mind of the public. Luxury goods must acquire high symbolic status before customers are willing to pay good prices for them. Becker writes (1982, 113) that "Dealers try to train appreciators to be collectors. That means adding to the appreciation of the work such elements as pride and confidence in displaying one's taste, the confidence showing in the expenditure involved and the willingness to let others know you have made it." One's cultural capital, in other words, must have wide social acknowledgment before it has worth. In Bourdieuan terms, the path towards a dominant position in the field is not always clear, especially in a situation of newness. There is a social struggle to define which types of activities and which ways of pursuing those activities will be seen as valorous. White (1993, 104) discusses an analogous situation in among Native Americans in the southwest. "Local Pueblo potters had ... been facing disastrous competition from outside, from metal and later plastic as well as mass-produced ceramic pots and bowls. The more nimble of the potters responded to the chance to reconstrue pottery into art, high art for others' eyes." Pottery is merely a convenient container, easily replaced, until the acquisition of certain pieces (and certain pieces only) socially confirms the prestigious cultural capital of the buyer. "Owner" must become "collector," a position of high symbolic capital. In Gell's terms, patrons of the arts must see as personally valuable the parts of their distributed persons that the artwork is to become. No one wants to add a wart to their distributed person. The money that buyers bring to the art world is necessary; but to get that money, artists and gallery owners have to convert an economic transaction into a transaction of cultural and symbolic capital. The index must perform an agreeable agency on the recipients—or at least on a large number of them, preferably on those at the dominant pole of the field of power.

Collectors and patrons are vitally important parts of a healthy art world. Where they do not already exist, they must be created. One gallery owner who spent a long time taking great pains to educate the local populace about art, finally began restricting the openings for gallery shows to a carefully selected guest list (which is checked at the door) after realizing that the vast majority of those attending the openings were more interested in the free alcohol than in any of the other aspects of the event: "People didn't pay any attention at all to the art. They don't have to buy anything, but I just want them to have some respect. This is supposed to be about the art." By restricting the openings to a select group (while simultaneously

highly publicizing them), the gallery owner is working to make “collector” a scarce, and therefore more valuable, social role.

Another gallery owner has given up on the local population as a potential source of buyers: “Only Europeans are interested in art anyway. At the art opening at the government house last night, there were 58 people, almost all Europeans.” Even the National Museum is perceived as being uninterested in local arts production. “I’m disappointed in the National Museum because it’s half empty and they are not buying any contemporary work,” says one member of the art world. “I tell them, ‘You should be buying this stuff now, keeping a record of it.’ They will wait until it’s too expensive for them to afford.” Because the art market on Rarotonga is still trying to gain legitimacy, the National Museum—as the ultimate arbiter of legitimacy—has yet to recognize it. Only when local art has been somehow legitimated elsewhere (and expresses that legitimacy in high price tags) will the museum curators be interested in acquiring it.

Yet another gallery owner takes a rather disparaging view of the motivations of the local art consumers: “It’s all ‘keep up with the Joneses’ on Rarotonga. I like to get them drunk and then they start buying things. One will buy something and then her friend will say, ‘If she’s having it, then I’ll have it, too’ and so then she buys one as well.” In effect, the gallery owner is recognizing—and finding somewhat distasteful—the rather raw market for symbolic capital. This comment beautifully demonstrates the workings of distinction in the field of cultural consumption that Bourdieu and DiMaggio postulate. Precisely the connection between status and the embodied aspects of cultural capital work together to help this gallery owner sell art works to the local population. Buyers are still naïve enough (at least when sufficiently inebriated) to express their social—as opposed to aesthetic—motivations openly.

Although more subtly expressed, the same idea of selling cultural capital and its concomitant idea, distinction, work together to produce the commodity of elitism that can in itself be so alluring to consumers. Says one gallery owner, “We set the benchmark and then everyone will come up to that” —a comment that shows the power of disinterestedness, a delicate refusal to acknowledge the market aspects of symbolic and cultural capital. Another gallery owner echoed, “My strategy to educate the public is to bash them over the heads with it and keep bashing them again and again until they get it.” These comments show the pose of disinterestedness that the gallery owners find so profitable—in terms of economic capital as well as cultural capital—to espouse. The pose of disinterestedness gives the gallery owners themselves distinction—distinction that their patrons can then purchase. “I’m doing this because I love it, not to make any money or anything like that,” says one gallery owner. “If things sell, that’s good [only] because it allows us to put on the next show.” Like the taunga, the art world member only achieves high status by eschewing self-interest.

The working artists themselves are often in private more forthcoming about their economic interests. Says one artist about placing artworks with the gallery owner quoted immediately above, “When I don’t have a commission on, I have

no choice but to give them to [that gallery]. I don't like doing it because [they put] a 100 percent commission on everything, where I've priced it to move, see? But there's nowhere else." Although the gallery owner may not be selling art "to make any money or anything like that,"⁵ working artists often feel somewhat differently. There is a type of division of labor in the production of cultural capital—the artists produce the objects and the gallery owners produce the esteem, the symbolic capital, that attaches to the objects.

The Galleries

It is difficult to get an exact count of the number of art galleries on Rarotonga owing to the gradations that exist between contemporary fine arts galleries, shops selling some fine art along with other merchandise, and curio shops with a few pieces of local art for sale. In this study, I did not include shops that were largely curio shops, but did include galleries that also sold other merchandise, especially black pearls, which are an important part of the merchandise in one of the largest fine art galleries on the island, one where many of the artists included in this study exhibited their work and where a few of them were also employed. Within that broad category of fine arts galleries, there were two distinct types.

The first were galleries devoted primarily to the work of one artist, often owned and run by the artists themselves. The local market, Punanga Nui (open every day, but only really active on Saturday mornings) housed two different galleries owned and operated by artists, one a sculptor and one a painter. These galleries stock largely, but not necessarily exclusively, the work of the owner/operator and are, albeit to differing degrees, oriented towards the Saturday-morning tourist buyers. These are small galleries, in terms of square feet, and are staffed mostly by the artist with occasional help from family members. There are a few other individual owner/operator galleries mostly located on the main road that circles the island, announcing themselves with signs designed to attract the passing tourists. All of the artists who operate these types of galleries have the role of "artist" as their primary occupation.

The second type of gallery is the larger gallery displaying the works of several local artists. The owners and operators of these galleries were mostly not artists themselves, but rather see themselves as promoters of art. (One exception to this was a purely fine art gallery owned and run by a husband and wife team who were both working artists.) These galleries often put on group or solo exhibitions, had openings to which the local arts reporters came and gave press coverage, and took an active role in promoting local, contemporary art. Although these galleries did

5 Although the gallery owner says that making money is not a consideration, this artist recognizes how effective the gallery is at doing precisely that. A pair of other more art-for-art's-sake gallery owners who might offer another outlet are summarily dismissed as "mad as hatters, the both of them."

exhibit artworks by Cook Islanders from islands other than Rarotonga, by expatriate artists living on Rarotonga, and even occasionally work by Pacific Islanders from other countries, the main emphasis was on art produced by the most prominent of the Rarotongan artists. Indeed, it was their exhibitions at these galleries that gave those artists their prominence. These galleries were more apt than the one person owner/operator galleries to also include non-art merchandise. For example, the largest of the galleries, located in the capital town of Avarua, devoted almost half of its floor space to selling black pearls and black pearl jewelry. These galleries often have a staff of workers not necessarily related to the owner and charge a sometimes hefty commission to the artists who sell their work through them.

There are two other ways in which art works are sold on the island that do not fall into the category of “gallery.” The first is through individual commissions. Artists will sometimes sell works out of their studios for specific patrons. The artists in this case have not “set up shop” the way the individual owner/operator galleries have, but are merely available on an individual basis for buyers who have somehow become aware of them. These buyers are more likely to be locals than tourists, although, again, this is not necessarily so. For example, many artists on the island use photographic copies of their paintings to make greeting cards that are then sold in shops around the island. Tourists who see these cards and inquire about the artists are then directed directly to the artists. Secondly, artists also hang works for sale in other business, especially cafes and restaurants where the primary purpose of the business is not to sell art. Once again the primary target for the sale of these artworks is the tourist market.

The artists themselves seldom rely on only one of these venues to sell their work. For instance, the owner of one of the individual owner/operator galleries also exhibits his work with one of the multi-artist galleries and takes commissions directly out of his studio, which is separate from his gallery. And the galleries themselves seem to be proliferating. During the time of the research period, one new multi-artist gallery opened and another began preparations for opening, two new individual owner/operator galleries began preparations for opening, and the local newspaper publicized several new faces on the art scene who would be available for individual commissions.

The Artworks

The artworks currently being produced for the market on Rarotonga fall into three broad categories. The first group is the work that straddles the line between Art and craft—and includes what are in fact the most traditional art forms, especially wood carving. Carving in wood predated western contact in the Cooks and was primarily used to fashion images of the pantheon of Maori gods, used for worship and protection (such as the images of Tangaroa,* the god of the sea and of fertility, which were carved with pointed bases to fit into the prows of the ocean-going canoes in order to protect the voyagers and to bring fishermen good luck with

their catches.) As discussed in Chapter 2, the market for these carvings began almost immediately upon contact with Westerners and the objects themselves were modified by their makers so as to make them more attractive to potential foreign buyers. Today, these sorts of carvings form a large portion of the Rarotongan art market, especially carvings of *pate* (the traditional hollowed wooden drums) and images of *Tangaroa*, which are available for purchase in sizes ranging from a few inches high to several feet tall, with the majority falling on the smaller, more suitcase-friendly end of the scale. The quality of the carvings varies considerably, as well, with once again the vast majority being at the lesser end of the scale, crude and quickly made by anonymous carvers working directly for the larger curio shops or on commission for small curio-shop/galleries. However, a few artists have taken the carvings of *Tangaroa* into the realm of fine art, creating unique and thought-provoking pieces. Ian George, for example, one of the most prominent of the Rarotongan artists holding a Masters degree in Fine Arts from Elam, University of Auckland, works both as a painter and a sculptor, incorporating images of *Tangaroa* as a central motif of his work, including a 1997 exhibition in a major New Zealand gallery, “Totems: Redefining *Tangaroa*.” Another sculptor, Eruera Nia, trained in fine arts at the university level in New Zealand and for many years a filmmaker there, also works in wood and incorporates traditional Polynesian motifs and images into his work, but is often less overtly representational than George. Because of the prominence of geometrical patterns in traditional tattooing and decoration, Nia’s incorporation of those elements into his work adds a further element of abstraction to his sculptures. Interestingly, even though George and Nia are university educated in the fine arts and sell their works for thousands of dollars through high end galleries on the island and abroad, Rarotongans (both inside and outside the arts community, including both George and Nia) still very seldom use the words “sculptor” or “sculpture,” and instead refer to “carvers” and “carvings,” a decidedly more craft-oriented term than the artistic terminology of “sculpture.”

Tivaevae are also included in this group of works still in the process of negotiating the transition from craft to art. Although *tivaevae* were not made in the Cooks before western contact, this fusion of European quilting and Maori *tapa*-making emerged relatively quickly after the first missionaries arrived (see Chapter 2.) *Tivaevae* are still used ceremonially during weddings, funerals, and hair-cuttings and are not often sold, but are given away to relatives and loved ones. Nevertheless, some *tivaevae* are beginning to come to the art market and being sold in the very highest end of the art galleries on the island, for prices rivaling or even surpassing other types of art. Interestingly, almost all of the *tivaevae* thus marketed are made on the island of Atiu at the Atiu Fibre Arts Studio, which is the creation of a German woman, Andrea Eimke, who founded it in 1986 alone and has since hired two additional women to work alongside her.

Although some traditional weaving, such as the making of *rito* hats, still is practiced in the Cooks, weaving in general has not made the jump into the field of fine art that carving and *tivaevae* making are making.

The broad second group of artworks are paintings, both murals used around the island as public art and easel paintings, the single largest component of the Rarotongan art market. Painting is not a traditional Cook Islands activity and there are still vestiges of “foreignness” clinging to the practice. Nevertheless, both indigenous and expatriate artists engage in painting as the dominant mode of artistic expression in the fine arts-oriented community. Almost without exception, the paintings are representational, although some do incorporate abstract geometrical designs based on traditional Maori iconography. Paintings depicting Rarotongans engaged in “traditional” activities are especially common. For example, expatriate artist Andi Merkens produced a series of paintings of women either working on or displaying *tivaevae*. Native Rarotongan Tim Buchanan also produced several paintings showing Rarotongan women working in groups on *tivaevae*, as well as paintings of locals picnicking on the beach or performing music together in string bands, and also paintings depicting more “modern” activities, such as the regulars gathered drinking and gossiping at the bar of a popular restaurant. Many artists, both indigenous and expatriate work on images of traditional Cook Islands dancers, which are the specialty of long time resident expatriate Judith Kunzle. Joan Rolls-Gragg, a native of Rarotonga, has produced a whole series of paintings and drawings of local women riding the ubiquitous motorbikes around the island. Interestingly, both Ian George and Apii Rongo have produced series of paintings depicting Tangaroa—in Rongo’s case, as an active figure engaging in activities such as fishing in the lagoon (using Coca-Cola bottles as floats or modern flashlights for night fishing) or using rifles to hunt bats in the mountains. These images directly address the tensions between traditional and modern ideas and lifestyles on the island. Although not exclusively, these types of images, which take as their main subject matter the cultural tensions on the island, especially around issues of modernization, are largely produced by indigenous Cook Islanders, whether born and raised on the island, as in the case of Rongo, or born and/or educated elsewhere, but of Cook Islands ancestry and living on Rarotonga now, as in the case of George.

Landscapes and still-lives (especially of local flowers and fruits) are another common subject of paintings. Although painters from all across the ethnic spectrum produce paintings of these types, they are especially prevalent in the works of expatriate painters. Part of the reason for this may be that many of the expatriate artists on the island predated the rise of fine arts galleries and, therefore, relied very heavily on curio shops to market their artworks. Moreover, many expatriate painters feel a certain amount of discomfort in fully engaging in the dialogue surrounding the overt cultural tensions on the island, tensions that crop up repeatedly in the paintings depicting local people engaged in activities on the island. Given the heatedness of the recent debates over the place of expatriate painters in the Cook Islands art world (as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4), many expatriate painters may feel more comfortable limiting their subject matter to areas that still remain relatively non-confrontational, like landscapes.

The final broad category of artworks includes mixed-media, multi-media and new media works. These types of works are produced almost exclusively by those artists, both indigenous and expatriate, who have been formally trained in the arts. In this category are included works by Ian George that incorporate collaged photographs into paintings, installations by Ani O'Neill that set up environments using crocheted flowers and leaves, and constructions by Glen Mills incorporating local materials and commodities, such as the shell necklaces used in the traditional Turama ceremonies and also sold in the curio shops, to comment on the commodification and commercialization of traditional Cook Islands culture. Although these innovative art forms are beginning to show up more and more in the work of Cook Islands artists, they still comprise a very small part of the total market where paintings and carvings in general still define what is meant by "art."

Although there are some differences between the art produced by the indigenous artists and that produced by the expatriates, the differences are subtle and are swamped by the similarities. Both groups work primarily in paintings (oils, acrylics, and watercolors) and carvings (wood and some stone), with some forays into more slightly experimental types of art. What then makes some of this art particularly "Maori?" As we will see in Chapter 4, the question of what is "Maori" is a particularly volatile one in the Rarotongan art world and there has been no consensus achieved either inside or outside the arts community. Hanson (1989) ignited a major controversy in the anthropological community by arguing that traditional (New Zealand) Maori culture "is increasingly recognized to be more an invention constructed for contemporary purposes than a stable heritage handed on from the past." (1989, 890) Nevertheless, as Linnekin (1991, 447) notes, "Symbolically constructed traditions are therefore not inauthentic; rather, all traditions—Western and indigenous—are invented, in that they are symbolically constructed in the present and reflect contemporary concerns and purposes rather than a passively inherited legacy."

Hansen argues (1989, 894, emphasis in original) that the construction of Maori identity in New Zealand happens in a context where contrasts with the dominant Pakeha [White] culture play an important defining role.

The movement known as Maoritanga (Maoriness) or Mana Maori (Maori Power) is one of the most important developments in New Zealand society today. ... Its image of the future New Zealand is a bicultural society, in which Maoris are on a par with Pakeha culture ... To promote that image, it is necessary to stress the unique contribution that Maori culture has made to national life—different from but no less valuable than the Paheka contribution. Thus, the Maori tradition that Maoritanga invents is one that *contrasts* with Paheka culture, and particularly with those elements of Paheka culture that are least attractive. ... Maori culture is represented as the ideal counterbalance to these Paheka failings.

Owing to the often tense political situation in New Zealand between Maori and Paheka cultures, ethnic identities are constructed with the dynamic of difference in mind—that is, as consciously distinct and oppositional. Cook Islanders, especially those educated in New Zealand, likewise construct a Maori identity that often references differences with the *papa'a** residents and visitors to the islands. Hansen, in fact, argues for a central place of fine art in the construction of Maori identity in New Zealand, focusing on exhibitions of Maori art to proclaim the existence of a distinctive and valuable Maori identity.

One of the most effective projects to publicize Maoritanga's invention of Maori culture was the exhibition 'Te Maori: Maori Art from the New Zealand Collections' ... As the standing of Maori art skyrocketed in international recognition as a result of the exhibition, Maori and Paheka New Zealanders alike took greater interest and pride in it and became more receptive to the idea of a non-rational, spiritual quality in Maori culture. While the point should not be overemphasized, the exhibition did have some effect in both strengthening Maori identity and increasing Paheka respect for the Maori people and Maori culture. ... The concept of cultural ownership of art objects, which had not been enunciated prior to 'Te Maori,' has enriched the significance of tribal membership for Maori people and represents an important step toward Maoritanga's goal of bringing the Maori heritage under Maori control ... (Hanson 1989, 896)

This dovetails nicely with White's (1993) argument that taste, especially as it relates to inclusion within the canon, is a venue for the witnessing of identities.

Thematically and stylistically, the artworks produced in the Cooks by Cook Islanders or by expatriates show many more similarities than differences. What makes certain artworks "Maori," then, is that they are produced by artists who claim an indigenous identity. As we shall see in Chapter 4, however, those claims to identity are neither easy nor uncontested.

Tourists as Buyers

Both gallery owners and the artists themselves repeatedly asserted that tourists to the island were the main purchasers of art in the Cooks—ranging from the low end, mass-produced commodities imported from the cheap manufacturing centers located in Indonesia and elsewhere to the high end fine art produced on the island by the artists in this study. Official Cook Islands government websites and tourist information devote significant space to discussions of arts and crafts in the Cooks (including both the visual and the performing arts and fine art as well as traditional craft productions), but none of the tourist art buyers to whom I spoke originally came to the Cooks with the specific intent to buy art.

One visitor who initially heard about the Cooks from an acquaintance commented:

I told [the acquaintance] that I was planning to go to Tahiti and she said, ‘Oh, Tahiti’s not so nice, but Rarotonga’s very nice—you’ll like it. Rarotonga is like Tahiti was 50 years ago.’ I knew nothing about art on Rarotonga. I knew about Gauguin and all those things coming out of Tahiti. I’d been looking at Gauguin since I was 13 years old. On my second day, I walked into a gallery in Arorangi. We were staying in Arorangi and I just walked in.

Another couple, who ended up making repeated trips to the Cooks, forming deep attachments to some of the artists there and putting together an extensive collection of Cook Islands art, initially had no intention of buying art there.

I’m not 100 percent sure how I heard of Rarotonga. We first went there in 1997. My husband had read a very brief article in the [local newspaper] travel section and then he did some research. We didn’t know about the art when we first went there. We discovered it while we were eating in a bar/restaurant. There were these cool paintings all around.

That initial encounter led to the formation of strong and lasting friendships with some of the local artists.

It’s like the community there—it’s such a funny little community. You meet one group of people and that leads to another group of people. We established a bond with some of the people there. Our daughter was conceived on Rarotonga and [a local artist] knew that and he did a painting about that and then the next time we went, it was waiting for us. So we have something personal that represents us—that one painting—we know it was done just for us and that’s pretty amazing. We came to know him really well, hung out with the family, the kids, the whole thing.

The buyers to whom I spoke had all purchased art at the high end art galleries on the island and many of them expressed some disdain for the “tourist” art that they found on the island. Said one of her general impression of art on Rarotonga: “Quite a lot of it was pandering to the tastes of what they thought that tourists might like—the bloody hibiscus flower is like an *idée fixe*.”

Discussing pieces that she chose not to buy, one visitor commented on her dislike of pieces that were too obviously oriented towards the stereotypical images of the South Seas islands. “I didn’t buy [an expatriate artist’s] pieces—I liked them as images on cards, but I didn’t want to own them because I felt that I’d already seen what she had seen. I liked some of [a local artist’s] things, but felt that they were of a different era. They were dated almost before she finished them, so I didn’t need to own them.”

Nevertheless, despite their sentiments of displeasure with the obvious pandering to stereotypical tourist tastes, all of the buyers to whom I spoke purchased the artworks that they did because of a feeling that the works were unique to the

Cooks and had a special connection to the islands. Said one, “The artwork evoked the spirit of the island, the whole experience of being in the South Pacific. And it evoked an emotional response.” Another, commenting on the appeal of the “uniqueness” of the island artwork as an important part of their appeal, said, “I saw something in a gallery shop there that I thought was really beautiful and unlike other things that I’d seen in other places and I thought I should move quickly to get it before I lost the opportunity.”

The theme of “uniqueness” ran through all of the interviews with tourists buyers.

I think what I really like about Rarotonga is that it’s such a microcosm. One of our quests was to go to a bunch of South Pacific islands, but ... [o]ne of the things I found lacking in Tahiti, New Caledonia, other places we’ve been, is that there’s a lot of carving, but there’s not as much painting *per se*. The Rarotongan artists get a lot of juice going back and forth to New Zealand and making that Maori connection, but they make it their own. It evokes the island really well. It captures the spirit of the island, the people and the colors. And it’s really unique. You take a piece of it when you leave. It’s kind of its own thing, which is amazing for what they are—how isolated they are. It’s so vibrant.

In some ways, the tastes of the tourist buyers necessitate that the local artists walk a fine line between the “pandering” use of stereotypical imagery and evoking the unique “spirit of the island.” For while these buyers had sophisticated tastes, they were also looking for art that specifically referenced the local culture. For example, two of the buyers to whom I spoke had purchased sculptures of Tangaroa, but in both cases the sculptures were “unique,” not the run-of-the-mill wooden carvings churned out to fit easily into suitcases. “We have a couple of Tangaroa sculptures—two of the biggest ones ever made. One is by [a local artist] that was commissioned for us.” In the second case, the buyer specifically commented on the distinctiveness of the piece as one of the main components in its appeal. “I got that because it wasn’t the sort of thing that tourists would buy. It was made by a glass artist from New Zealand who was doing a residency. It had lots of international resonances and I felt very attached to it straightaway. It’s cast glass and it looks like amber or toffee.”

All of the buyers I interviewed saw their own tastes changing as they became more knowledgeable about Cook Islands art. This is especially true for those who have made repeated trips to the island. “As [a local artist] evolved, we watched him evolve. We learned a lot more about traditional arts by going to other exhibits—like the tivaevae exhibit at the National Museum. So we came to appreciate the culture. We evolved along with it.” In this way, then, the buyers are aware of their growing cultural capital.

The Transition from Artisan to Artist

The evolution of the buyers' cultural capital is part of the creation of an international market for Cook Islands art and of a vibrant art world on Rarotonga. But buyers are not the only members of the art world that must be created—the artists themselves must be socially constructed in the same way. On Rarotonga, “artisans” and “craftspeople” had to make the social transition to “artist.” This is a transition of *meaning* rather than a transition of *activities*. As Williams (1981, 48–51) argues in his discussion of the historical development of the institutions of the art world:

Indeed production *for* the market, as a purpose taking priority over any other is widely evident in each phase [of historical development], though there are many examples of producers struggling against or effectively ignoring market trends. Culturally this interaction is crucial, for it defines the social relations of artists at a different level from that of most other kinds of production. ... At the root of these distinctions is an attempted differentiation between the production of one kind of object and another. This can be expressed as a contrast between the ‘merely utilitarian’ and the ‘artistic’, or, on the other hand, between the ‘useful’ and the ‘merely cultural’ ... [These distinctions have] never been satisfactory. The widespread and in many cases willing and eager involvement of cultural producers in what are really quite normal market relationships has always cut across it. But this has significantly led, within each art, to further attempted distinctions between ‘commercial’ and other (‘creative’, ‘authentic’) forms of the same manifest practice.

In Gell's terms, the index (the art object) has agency over the artists—it makes them into “artists” or into “mere craftspeople.” This is done, however, through the mediation of the recipients of the index and their valuation of it. It is necessary, in the transition from artisan to artist, that the meaning attached to objects—“artistic” rather than “merely cultural”—be accorded high symbolic status. In order to do that, the art world often must police the activities of its members so that they produce in the ways which fit with valorized ideas about high culture. This may mean limiting production and, ironically, tying cultural capital to economic capital. One artist explained to me how he is attempting to reform the production habits of another artist in order to confer prestige upon their entire profession: “I say, ‘Why not instead of churning out hundreds of these little [low-quality pieces], you just do a few really nice ones and charge more for them?’” The artist feels that his friend is hurting all of them by producing vast numbers of low-quality works. He is very openly encouraging his friend to make his artistic productions more scarce and to use price (economic capital) as a signal for high quality and, more importantly, high status.

The hidden, yet important, connection between economic and cultural capital can leave artists balanced on a tricky high-wire. Becker (1982, 281) notes that,

“Craft organization subordinates the craftsman to an employer, at whose insistence and for whose purpose the work is done. But the contemporary folk definition of art presumes that the artist works for no one ...” Yet artists must make money to survive and to continue to make art. Without the workshop system of craft production to support them, artists are entirely dependent on finding buyers for their wares. In the Cook Islands, Crocombe (2001, 183) writes: “Artists must live so art adapts to meet the needs of those who pay for it. The dominant patrons have shifted over the past 200 years from gods and chiefs, to churches, colonial governments and settlers, to independent governments and cultural organizations, to the travel industry and to ‘locals’ who live abroad.” Full time working artists in the Cooks mostly have little financial room to indulge in ignoring the demands of the public. One artist matter-of-factly explained the business-like manner in which sales occur:

There are a couple of cafes where I put some things. I never really have any paintings on hand because they always sold as soon as I’d finished them. People would come by or call up and say they had seen one of my paintings somewhere and I would say to them, ‘How long are you here?’ and then I would do something for them and send it along to them when it was finished.

Another artist said, “One of the smart things I did was to keep a photographic record of the work that could be made into cards and people would see those and ring up and say, ‘Well, have you got any originals around?’”

There is a fine negotiation between the use of picture postcards for business purposes and maintaining the high symbolic status of “originals.” Becker writes (1982, 339) that “aspirants to the status of art have to dissociate themselves from related crafts or commercial enterprises ... and emphasize those elements of their pasts which are most clearly artistic while suppressing less desirable ancestors.” Not only do artists have to eat, however, but achieving financial stability enough to free oneself from the quotidian demands of the marketplace can be in itself a marker of high status. At this stage in the development of the Cook Islands art market, the artists still gain some legitimacy in proportion to the amount of money that they can earn from their art. The artists are struggling to be socially recognized on a higher level of the status hierarchy, a level where prestige lies in *not* being interested in economic gain. But this position is only possible after the artists have achieved economic independence. The negotiation of movement from the heteronomous to the autonomous pole of the field of cultural production⁶ (Bourdieu 1985) requires, certainly, *finesse*.

The transition from artisan to artist on Rarotonga is happening within the context of a transition in the art world from legitimacy based on economic capital

6 That is, from producing art to the specification of others, as did the makers of carved idols for the missionary trade, to producing art-for-art’s-sake without regard for the demands of the market.

to legitimacy based on symbolic capital. While the non-art-world Cook Islanders accord prestige to artists only to the extent that they are financially successful, the art world members themselves have begun to operate on the basis of symbolic capital. When the gallery owner talks about “setting the benchmark” to which he expects his customers to rise, it is really this that underlies his comments—the transition to a conception of art not as a commodity (even as a luxury commodity), but as pure symbol. In order to bring non-art-world conceptions of artistic activity into line with art world conceptions, the cultural capital of the artists and gallery owners must become widely socially valorized. Artists and gallery owners on Rarotonga must become taste makers in the way the Brahmins did in Boston. In order to do this, the Brahmins relied on social capital—social ties—to set up organizations which masked the self-interest of the Brahmins (the class domination aspect of their motives) in the guise of disinterestedness. The Rarotongan artists and gallery owners have not yet reached this stage of development. They have yet to mobilize their social ties into permanent organizations of high culture which can enshrine their cultural capital as the pinnacle of Cook Islands society. In part, this is because they are still too bound up with economic concerns. In part, this is because they need an *outside* authority to legitimate their cultural capital in the eyes of the local populace. Standing at the edge of the transition into the next phase of the development of the art world, Cook Islands artists and gallery owners have begun to look for that outside authority overseas.

Creating an Audience—Going International

The complex relationship between economic and symbolic capital plays out at the group level as Cook Island art world members are increasingly looking to establish a presence on the international art scene. A *Cook Islands News* article, “Cook Islands arts—where to now?,” depicted local artists as being poised on the brink of breaking out of the local setting (Carr 1 October 2002, 5):

Cook Islands art has been on a roll over the past 18 months with 10 exhibitions, five art workshops and three artist-in-residency projects. The question now is where do we go from here? The answer says Ben Bergman of Beachcomber is the only logical place—New Zealand. More specifically, to establish a Cook Islands art presence overseas. ‘One way of doing this is exposing the local art scene through the overseas media,’ says Bergman. To do this, Bergman says a reviewer called Dan Chappel will be flown down for a November 4 art exhibition. ... Apart from exposing the local art scene to New Zealand, the review is also part of a plan to give people another reason to visit the Cook Islands—either to purchase or view local art.

The overseas exposure is being carefully coordinated and controlled by artists and gallery owners. There has been much dissatisfaction among the art world members

with the way in which government agencies are handling the marketing of Cook Islands art. One artist commented, "It is being packaged as a cheap Tahiti. We're getting the wrong kind of tourists because of that—just backpackers and people looking for a bargain, not people who can appreciate culture." Another gallery owner has noticed a change in the sophistication of the art buying tourists over the years: "People come in the gallery now and say how glad they are to find some place not filled with all this stuff from Bali." It is obvious to those involved that symbolic capital is the commodity being sold, although they express themselves, especially gallery owners, in terms of "sophistication" and "quality." "That's a very sophisticated art world," says one gallery owner of New Zealand. "If we go into it with some of this low quality stuff, it will just be, 'good-bye!'"

"Quality" and "sophistication" are, of course, socially determined concepts, tied very strongly to the valorization of certain types of cultural capital. Cook Islands art world members find the local emphasis on art as a consumer commodity to be demeaning—it works against their attempts to raise their own symbolic capital. Moreover, selling culture as a commodity ultimately leads to a dead end. As Crocombe (2001, 192) points out: "The more aspects of culture become marketable to outsiders, the less they are uniquely indigenous. It is the 'unique' aspects of culture that outsiders most want access to. [But] sharing secrets reduces their value as secrets ..."

It is uniqueness and, most importantly as Bourdieu reminds us, scarcity that gives value to cultural capital. Producing art as a mere consumer good, where economies of scale should translate into greater profits, destroys the prestige of the artwork. One art world member explained how he sees the creation of uniqueness as the key to legitimating the Cook Islands art world:

I have a running argument with [an artist]. See, he sits on these boards in New Zealand and they are all interested in promoting a *regional* identity. And I say, 'All the art here looks the same.' I tell them to stop painting little triangles and lizards and motifs and things—it's just like everything done in every other country in the South Pacific. Where is the *Cook Islands* art? What is distinctive about us? If someone were to walk into a shop in Auckland or Sydney or Los Angeles and see a display of South Pacific art, how could they look at a piece of it and say, 'Ah, *that's* Cook Islands?' Where is *our* national identity? I think the senior artists need to get together and figure this out. But, see, the organizations in New Zealand want to promote a *regional* identity. The Samoans produced a book called *Samoan Art* and they were all very displeased about that.

The idea that "senior artists" should direct this is interesting. It may be the beginning step of using social capital in the way that the Boston Brahmins did—to set up cultural institutions which would legitimate and valorize the cultural capital of the art world on Rarotonga.

The Auction

One of the first overtly institutionalized actions of the Rarotongan art world as such occurred on 21 March 2003 when the Creative Centre, a local non-profit organization for adults with learning disabilities, held a benefit charity auction, the first formal art auction ever held in the Cooks. Twenty-four artists, a very large percentage of the local art world, participated in the auction—22 from Rarotonga, one from Atiu (another of the southern Cook Islands) and one from Samoa. The build-up to the auction was intense for weeks preceding it, with frequent articles in the local newspapers and preview showings of the available art works in various businesses around the island. A calendar showing tiny reproductions of the artworks was also produced for sale in local shops. A website was set up to take on-line bids before the actual auction night.

The gallery where the auction itself would be held placed several full-page ads in local papers emphasizing that admission to the auction would require the purchase of a C1\$20 entrance ticket and would be limited to only 150 people. To add even more prestige to the event, Marshall Siefert, describe in the press as a “NZ art gallery owner and television identity,” was flown in to provide a running commentary on the artworks during the auction.

The charitable aspects of the auction were emphasized in the press. “‘The auction will provide Cook Islands businesses and individuals the opportunity to purchase a piece of art and at the same time assist with something worthwhile,’ said [Creative Centre trustee Paul] Carrad.” (Carr, 3 February 2003, 3) As had been the case with the Brahmins in Boston, the charitable aura surrounding the proceedings gave Cook Islanders involved in the auction the air of disinterestedness. Buying luxury items for themselves could be transformed into outward-directed, community-minded actions. This is precisely how symbolic capital can be accrued and cultural capital can be legitimated. Buyers can be praised for buying; painters can be praised for painting. The artworks purchased at the auction became symbolic halos on the distributed persons of both the buyers and the artists.

For the artists who donated works, however, the pre-auction press coverage resembled nothing so much as a horse race. Once the on-line bidding was set up, the weekly papers began printing lists of artists, in order from highest current bid to lowest, with commentary as to their standing vis-à-vis each other. Although there were only a total of five on-line bids before auction day and the prices of 20 of the 25 pieces did not change from their initial prices set by the artists,⁷ the papers’ coverage nevertheless had a breathless, coming-around-the-clubhouse-turn quality: “Mike Tavioni’s piece heads the table with a bid of \$751 just edging ahead of Fatu Feu’u. The biggest improver is Dernice (Sword) Rongo’s piece whose bid has leapt from \$50 last Thursday to \$300.” (C. Pitt, 22 March 2003, 14)

7 Of the initial set prices, the newspaper wrote: “As expected, Fatu Feu’u’s piece has attracted much interest. Our own Master, Mike Tavioni is not far behind with a piece by Judith Kunzle taking third spot.” (C. Pitt, 16 March 2003, 8)

The competitive diction was apt, though, as one bid in particular showed. On March 16, Tavioni's piece was priced at CI\$600, second highest behind Feu'u at CI\$750. Feu'u, although a frequent visitor to Rarotonga and a widely known and esteemed South Pacific artist, is Samoan, a foreigner. By the next week, while Feu'u's piece was still at CI\$750, Tavioni, the *local* "Master," now had the first place bid—CI\$751—a number clearly chosen by the bidder not to merely acquire Tavioni's artwork (which could have been done for CI\$601), but to "edge ahead" of the foreigner Feu'u in the public standings. Symbolic and economic capital are tied together.

The night of the auction itself was almost an exercise in the use of outside authority to enshrine certain cultural capital. Siefert's presence played a critically important role in inculcating art world values in the audience of potential buyers. Especially interesting was his repeated use of the word "serious" to describe the artists and the artworks, moving them away from the realm of the frivolous. As the press accounts note, he "was impressed with a number of works. He described Fatu's piece as a 'serious investment.' He referred to Mahariki Tangaroa as a 'serious artist' whom we were fortunate to have." (C. Pitt, 23 March 2003, 9) Siefert's laudatory comments carried great weight with the audience: "Marshall Seifert, art expert from New Zealand, clearly lifted support at the auction. 'He described each work for the bidders,' added Sword. 'He definitely enhanced the bidding and we're thankful for his support.'" (Hamilton, 27 March 2003, 1) In fact, the auction was a resounding success, taking in a total of just over CI\$35,000.⁸ It was also a social success for the buyers and other attendees whose pictures were prominently displayed in the society sections of the weekly papers during the next week.

The high-profile auction functioned to valorize the cultural capital of the world of contemporary Cook Islands art. That the proceeds were for charity and that an outside authority legitimated the "seriousness" of the endeavor were two factors that worked together to raise the symbolic capital of all the participants. One artist, whose work sold for among the lowest prices, told me, "Well, I've made a fool of myself in public. I didn't realize what a big deal it would be, so I just donated this little thing. [The buyer] felt sorry for me being embarrassed and bought it. Now I've learned my lesson. That's what I get for being selfish." This comment beautifully illustrates how the traditional Polynesian ideal of generosity works together with the valorization of cultural capital to make high symbolic capital. As Bourdieu notes, self-interest can be greatly enhanced by the appearance of disinterestedness. This artist now recognizes the "upside down" workings of the art world.

Moreover, an incident in the immediate aftermath of the auction demonstrated how much may have changed in the basis of status for art world members. When one of the participating artists complained in a letter to the editor (Sobieska 1 April

8 The highest price paid was CI\$4100 for Fatu Feu'u's piece, "Ole Atalii potu." "Cherish your culture," by Mike Tavioni, sold for CI\$2800.

2003, 4) that her work was not given enough time on the block during the auction for all potential buyers to have a chance to bid, she was immediately belittled in the press. The auctioneer responded with a letter to the editor of his own (JK, 2 April 2003, 4), dismissing her charges as “wonderful humour.” And, most scathingly, the anonymous author of the weekly gossip column, *Chooks Corner with the Red Rooster* (5 April 2003, 25), sneered, “Oh dear, we didn’t make the top ten did we, how sad! [sic]” The artist was publicly chided for giving the appearance of being interested in the monetary rankings of the participants, which was ironically, of course, *exactly* the focus of the pre-auction press coverage. Once cultural and symbolic capital came into play during the auction itself, an interest in economic capital gave the appearance of unseemliness. During the course of the auction, the basis of prestige shifted, at least temporarily, from economic to symbolic capital.

The art world, in Becker’s sense, is in the process of being created on Rarotonga. The creation of this world requires much more than merely the presence of sculptors sculpting or buyers buying. Those have existed on the island for 200 years. The creation of the art world is much more about creating *ideas* about value. The work of producing art objects must become a valued occupation, not just economically (although that is a necessary starting place), but, more importantly, symbolically. Likewise, the role of “artist” must be differentiated from mere “craftsperson” and must be valued symbolically, legitimated as taunga and economically rewarded in kind. Moreover, instead of mere “buyers,” “collectors” must be created who gain social status from buying artworks and who work in a symbiotic relationship with artists so that each affirms the social value of the other. These ideological transformations are not possible without stable cultural institutions (galleries, museums, an art press and so on) to keep the continual process of legitimation running smoothly. Through all of this, the most important transformation is the transformation of economic capital into cultural and symbolic capital and the achievement, finally, of “disinterestedness,” that marker of arrival. The disinterested actor sits securely at the autonomous art-for-art’s-sake pole of the cultural field, measuring all others with the yardstick of purity, wiped clean of the taint of money by an act of transcendent imagination and of social domination. The disinterested actor sets up the system of valuation and marks out all the boundaries.

The members of the Rarotongan art world are struggling to make sense of the intertwined strands of cultural, economic, symbolic and social capital. As the importance of symbolic and cultural capital grows, the policing of symbolic boundaries gains increasing significance. Although the members of the art world are capable of acting in concert for the benefit of all, they are also capable of great divisiveness, especially in the area of boundary marking. The next chapter details some of the internal conflicts which riddle the Rarotongan art world. These conflicts are perhaps only birth pangs as the art world matures and brings itself into being, but it is also possible that the delicate balance between divisiveness and communality is the key component for explaining the explosion of artistic creativity that the island is experiencing.

Chapter 4

The Artists I: Local, Foreign, and Foreign Locals

Some of the issues surrounding ethnicity, legitimacy, and boundary marking came to the fore in early 2002. A group of artists under the heading of the National Visual Arts Association (NVAA*—later changed to the Cook Islands National Visual Arts Society—CINVAS*) sent a letter to the Prime Minister expressing concerns over the presence of artists working on the island whom they considered to be illegitimate. The letter read in part:

28 January, 2002

Dear Prime Minister,

... We believe art galleries and arts and crafts outlets must be reserved for Cook Islanders only [emphasis in original]. Obviously it would not be possible to prevent PRs [permanent residents] from opening their own galleries or producing artworks once they reside here but it is of great concern ...

As ethnic Cook Islanders we find it offensive that foreigners are using our intellectual property (in the form of tivaivai, carving and tattoo motifs and traditional images, eg Tangaroa) in their artwork. Some expatriate artists have gone so far as to refer to themselves as ‘Cook Islands artists.’

We do not want to be another Hawaii or Tahiti where expatriate artists have flooded the market with their arts and crafts while the indigenous people’s arts are drowned out or ignored. As a people we are probably lacking in confidence and feel a bit insecure around foreigners with their brasher ways and larger wallets which is why we would like to invoke the help of government in stopping foreign investors already here from stepping outside their original businesses and dabbling in this area where Cook Islanders are more than qualified to operate, and to prevent a further influx of foreign investors from working in this area of business in the future. We look forward to your favorable response.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Tavioni – President

Mahiriki Tangaroa – Secretary

Executive Members:

Eruera Nia

Jean Tekura Mason

(The name of Ian George also appeared on the letter under the “Executive Members,” but he was out of the country at the time the letter was written and his signature does not appear next to his name as the others do.)

The main body of the letter listed five pieces of information to which the NVAA group wanted to draw the Prime Minister’s attention (for example, “2. this expatriate woman operates her own art gallery in Arorangi which stocks her material only; it appears that no effort is made by this woman to support local artists by selling their work through her gallery but she is not above selling the work of the same non-resident artist who came here to work for a motel [mentioned in point 1]” and five points of “concern” (for example, “4. that these foreign-owned businesses are eating into a small market that Cook Islands artists should have first rights to.”) Most of the letter seemed to be concerned with the unnamed but unmistakable “expatriate woman,” Andi Merkens, a white New Zealander living in the Cooks while her husband fulfilled a five-year contract teaching mathematics in the local secondary school. The letter was also sent to the Development Investment Board.

Rumors of the existence of the letter surfaced in an article in the *Cook Islands Herald* on 23 February 2002. Headlined “Foreign artists subject of complaints by local art group” and featuring a picture of Merkens at work on one of her paintings, the article begins, “Are foreign artists snatching the bread out of the mouths of local artists? One group of concerned local artists thinks so and at the end of January, wrote to the then Prime Minister demanding action.” (C. Pitt, 23 Feb 2002, 2) The main source for the article was Mike Tavioni, the President of NVAA and a signer of the letter. The article spells out Tavioni’s thoughts at some length:

Mike says that while he is sympathetic to the group’s concerns, and that the issues should be debated, there are deeper issues to be addressed. On some issues he distances himself. As an artist Mike said he has an affinity with all artists and will try to learn as much as he can from them.

Rather than be threatened by existing foreigners involved in art here, Mike recommends we learn from them and use their work to be self inspired to do better.

Mike told the Herald he disagreed with the group’s finger pointing of foreign artist Andi Merkens and her retail studio in Arorangi. ‘I’ve seen her work and I personally like it, true artists are creative people not negative.’

Mike believes that local artists need to knuckle down and produce more, especially more quality work. Eventually this will have the effect of ‘squeezing out’ the lower quality work that some overseas artists have been attempting to sell here.

Tavioni raises here the issue of local art production, arguing that “local” artists need to produce more product for the market and implying that part of the controversy lies in the connection between artistic output and economic gain. Another local artist (who did not sign the letter) explained that the reasoning behind the letter

was the fear that tourists (the main buyers of art) come to the island with a set amount of money budgeted to buy art and end up spending it on Merkens' work rather than on artwork by indigenous Cook Islanders.

The vast majority of the letter dealt with financial concerns, but cultural concerns appear in two sentences towards the end of the letter. ("As ethnic Cook Islanders we find it offensive that foreigners are using our intellectual property (in the form of tivaivai, carving and tattoo motifs and traditional images, eg Tangaroa) in their artwork. Some expatriate artists have gone so far as to refer to themselves as 'Cook Islands artists.'") These are issues of legitimacy and threats to one's ability to be perceived as "authentic" in a context where there are few barriers to entry into the "authentic" group and no (or ineffective) policing of the boundaries. The symbolic capital of indigeneity—valuable insofar as it is scarce—is seriously threatened once expatriate artists begin to call themselves "Cook Islands artists."

It is notable that the letter writers refer to "intellectual property" (meaning creations of the mind such as symbols, designs, motifs, and other artistic images), a concept that is not traditional to the islands. All of the letter's signatories had, in fact, been educated in New Zealand and their use of the concept of "intellectual property" signaled a more Western, modern, politicized take on indigenous culture and the appropriation of traditional images and themes for financial gain. As we shall see, the tension between the introduced concept of "intellectual property" and traditional values of generosity and cultural sharing divided what could have been a natural coalition of the indigenous artists against the expatriates. The emphasis on *intellectual property* rather than *mana* pointed up the interplay of economic and cultural capital at work.

These two different types of concerns—financial and cultural—persisted throughout the controversy with the cultural arguments increasingly gaining ascendancy. The financial aspects never faded, however. Economic capital is intimately, if often covertly, bound up with all the other types of capital. As one of the principals told me during an interview: "Andi is making a fortune—an absolute *fortune*—down there!" One of the CINVAS members said: "There's no reason for Andi Merkens to be running a shop—anyone can run a shop. It's *easy* to do. Our people end up being left with nothing but the lowest menial jobs." (Another gallery owner countered: "Selling art is an art itself. You couldn't have just anyone come into the shop and do it—some local kid. You have to know what you're about.")

It is important to note that at this time the distinction between "local" and "foreign" artists was considered non-problematic, at least on the surface. Or perhaps it would be better to say that the writers of the letter considered the distinction an easy one for them to make. Perhaps this is because the letter itself focused on Andi Merkens, a non-Maori New Zealander who was in the Cooks for five years because of her husband's employment contract, and to a lesser extent on (again unnamed but unmistakable) another non-Maori New Zealander who, though employed by a local hotel, was in the Cooks because of his wife's employment contract with the Cook Islands government. Later, Tavioni and others would question the ethnic

legitimacy of the letter writers themselves, many of whom were foreign-born and foreign-educated, and few of whom are particularly conversant in the Cook Islands Maori language, an important point for legitimating ethnic identity, even though all are ethnic Cook Islands Maoris.

Charles Pitt, the author of the article, also approached two other local artists, Rennie Peyroux and Nga Teariki, for comments. Neither is directly quoted, but the article gives the impression that they confirm Tavioni's point of view. (For example, "Rennie Peyroux agrees with Mike Tavioni in that the key to any threat of local artists being shut out of the local market is for production to be stepped up.") In asking these particular artists, Pitt, the main arts correspondent for both the *Cook Islands Herald* and the *Cook Islands Independent*, has taken an important symbolic stance—both are unquestionably "real" Cook Islands artists, born and raised in the islands, Maori speaking, and largely self-taught in the arts. They have long and deep connections to the local community. Already, in this first public notice of the letter's existence, the signers of the letter are being signaled as symbolic "outsiders" whose claims to cultural preservation and whose pleas for help and posture of defenselessness in the face of the foreign cultural onslaught are being subtly held up as a self-interested facade.

The letter had already had an effect on the artists about whom it was written. The second artist said:

The head of immigration said to my boss, 'We will come and we will get him and we will put him on the plane if we find out that he is selling art.' So for a long time my boss would ask me, 'You're not selling any art, are you?' and I would say, 'No, boss.'

Note that the issue here, at least for the head of immigration, was not *making* art, but only *selling* it, thus side-stepping the tricky issue of the use of intellectual property (which is concerned primarily with the use of ideas for economic gain) in artworks.

Even though the letter itself had yet to be published, the article about it generated a great deal of controversy. It was followed by an item on the local television news program and then, three days later, responses in the "Letters" column of *The Cook Islands News* from two of the letters signatories. The first, by Mahiriki Tangaroa, a New Zealand-born, -raised, and -educated artist of Cook Islands ancestry who had come to the Cooks at about the same time as had Merkena, claims that the (still not public) letter "was by no means intended to criticize the works of local artist, Andi Merkena, or any others like herself who may visit the island to produce quality work." Tangaroa says that the letter instead addresses the establishment of a national art gallery (which was never, in fact, mentioned in the letter). She concludes her brief letter by writing, "In consideration of the scope and complexities of this matter, it is best left to professionals for discussion." (Tangaroa, 26 February 2002, 4) Given that one of Tavioni's main points was that "the issues should be debated," there is perhaps an implication in Tangaroa's

final sentence that the debate should be limited to only “professionals.” As Becker makes clear (1982, 63), “Knowledge of professional culture, then, defines a group of practicing professionals who use certain conventions to go about their artistic business. ... The group defined by knowledge of these working conventions can reasonably be thought of as the inner circle of the art world.” Tangaroa implicitly regards her “professionalism,” including a bachelor’s degree in fine arts from a university in New Zealand, as an unproblematic indicator of high status and, in this final sentence, ignores the possibility that other, more local artists might instead find it a marker of her “outside-ness.” Indeed, she attempts to use control over her “secret” knowledge—her cultural capital—to keep others (including, perhaps, more “local” artists) outside of the inner circle of “professionals.”

The second letter, by Eruera Nia, another New Zealand-born, -raised, and -educated artist of Cook Islands ancestry, has a very different, largely conciliatory, tone. “This is one of those occasions,” he writes, “where I deeply regret not having thought beforehand, properly before signing a letter that would be detrimental to another artist. Andi and whatever she pursues with her art in our country has my full support.” (Nia, 26 February 2002, 4) Nia’s comments effectively undermined Tangaroa’s denial that the letter targeted Merkens. According to Merkens, Nia had already approached her on the street to apologize in person for his part in the letter and later had spent much time with Merkens’s teenage son going out drawing together around the island.

Four days later, in the next issue of the weekly *Cook Islands Herald*, a copy of the letter itself, under the headline “The controversial letter now been disowned by its signatories,” was printed next to an editorial roundly criticizing the writers of the letter. The editorial, titled “Local artists back pedal over deep anti-foreign tone,” states “The Herald commends the views of Mr. Tavioni and agrees with the sentiments that he ... expressed for the article.” The unsigned editorial implies that “true” Cook Islands artists do not share the point-of-view expressed by the authors of the letter. To help make the point, the editorial mentions Mereana Hutchinson, another “real” Cook Islander along the lines of Tavioni, Peyroux, and Teariki with deep claims to cultural legitimacy and authenticity:

These local artists who issued such anti-foreign remarks do not speak for all local artists. Gallery owner and artist Mereana Hutchinson for example, distances herself from such diatribe. She, and many others, would not subscribe to sentiments that reek of personal jealousy and inferiority complexes instead of camaraderie and encouragement for artistic truth and integrity. (n.a. 2 March 2002, 12)

The important contrast here is between “personal jealousy” and “camaraderie.” Jealousy theoretically goes very deeply against the cultural value of generosity. Recall the line from the legend of Nina-enua from Chapter 2, where the treacherous Rongomatane is left alone “to bury her dead and her jealousies.” (Rongo 2000, 18) Nevertheless, jealousy is often a key, if unacknowledged, ingredient in

maintaining the sense of equality and evenness throughout the islands. When one's actions or possessions work to make others jealous, the social stigmatizing that results is a powerful incentive to placate the jealous feelings by acts of generosity and by divesting oneself of the cause of the jealousy. As Mauss writes regarding Polynesia (1967, 105): "Distribution of wealth has the role of payment of a fine or propitiation of spirits and re-establishment of solidarity between spirits and men." Jealousy is an explicitly negative attribute, but it is somewhat incumbent upon both sides of the equation to ameliorate the situation. "Personal" jealousy goes against the communal norm of camaraderie, but also signals an imbalance in the equal distribution of goods within the community. It is, in Durkheimian terms, "functional" for the society. It is no accident that this incident of "personal jealousy" generated so much attention at a time when the basis of status on Rarotonga was undergoing such upheaval. Changes in the population, in the economic structure, and in the ideology of Cook Islands society have led to cultural dislocation that expresses itself in just such sentiments.

Debating "Authenticity"

Despite the headline claiming that the signers of the letter had "back pedalled," many months after the event, one of the members of CINVAS wrote to me:

The way Ms. Merkens manages to operate her business ... gets up our noses ... As far as we can see, she has no significant capital outlay (she rents a disused shop), she does not employ Cook Islanders, so what is the benefit to Cook Islanders of her business? As Maori Cook Islanders, we resent her being in business here. Unfortunately, people like [three local artists], (all of the older age group), who believe that 'art is universal', don't feel the same way we younger people do. I think this comes from their generation being brain-washed/conditioned socially not to exhibit their true feelings—particularly if the result is negative or confrontational/ or may be they truly believe in the basic good in all men, that it will all work out in the end—or it could be the influence of the church that we have to love one another and all that baloney/ or it could be we are just BAD!

Here the writer distinguishes not between authentic and inauthentic Cook Islanders, but between generations. The author sees the signers of the letter as unproblematically authentic "Maori Cook Islanders" in the same ethnic category as the "brain-washed" older generation. The addition of "Maori" to the designation is important, however. This is not a usual phrasing and serves to emphasize that, although the economic arguments are now more detailed and refined, nevertheless the debate has now been recast as a predominantly cultural issue—an ethnic group seeking to preserve its culture in the face of globalization.

The addition of the "Maori" designation also shows an awareness from the letter writers that their own group-identification was not so unproblematic as they had

at first imagined. Their own “Maori-ness” was questioned by Tavioni and others like him in the media and at public events. The two main issues were that many of the letter writers cannot speak Maori and that their actions are un-Maori in going against cultural norms of group cohesiveness and generosity. The message above continues: “Mike argued that most of those who wanted to promote Maori couldn’t even speak it! We felt he missed the point but to keep the peace (and prevent [the more traditional Cook Islands artists] possible withdrawal from CINVAS) it was decided to broaden the aims of the society.” Another artist dismissed the letter writers, noting that they “have all been trained in New Zealand. They’ve brought all of that [foreign art ideas] back here. They don’t speak Maori. They have European parents.” Another local artist commented, in a different context, “They [the members of NVAA/CINVAS] said, ‘We’re not keeping anyone out [of the organization].’ And I said, ‘Oh, aren’t you?’ They are all—every one of them—educated in New Zealand. These things they do—paintings—are not part of our culture. I said, ‘None of you can even speak our language—*my* language!’” It is the traditional Cook Islanders, not the expatriate artists, who now felt themselves to be excluded from the “professional” ranks of the CINVAS. Tavioni, despite having signed the letter himself, and others were positioning the authors of the letter as themselves being outside interlopers who were exploiting Maori cultural and symbolic capital to which they had no legitimate claims and were, moreover, excluding the “real” Cook Islanders from their organization. As Mason writes, “For being ‘European’ or ‘Maori’ is, to some extent, a matter of attitude. ... This has led to a degree of tension between the more commercially oriented and the more ‘indigenously’ inclined. ... [Even] the Deputy Prime Minister ... wrote about the ‘stranglehold and ruthless practices of poohbah papa’a businessmen...’” (2003, 181). Ethnicity is being defined by behaviors and attitudes rather than biology or kinship. Linnekin notes (1990, 155–6) the same process at work among Hawaiians, especially when dealing with “mixed-blood” others:

What, then, marks someone as Hawaiian rather than Portuguese when an individual has both kinds of ancestry? Of paramount importance is the way one conducts social relationships: one’s behavior in friendships, casual associations, and particularly gift exchanges. Certain behaviors are regarded as characteristically Hawaiian: generosity, gift-giving, humility, observing symmetry in exchange. ... Pretentious behavior and social climbing, identified as ‘acting high,’ are considered un-Hawaiian. Social isolation may befall a peer who violates the egalitarian ethic of relationships; such a person is *maha’oi*, ‘bold, brazen, uppity.’

The “older generation” mentioned above repeatedly emphasized the importance of speaking the Cook Islands language as marking legitimacy—indeed, it marked the “older” generation more effectively than did age itself as young Maori-speaking locals entered the art world. Nevertheless, language and generation are not entirely independent of each other: “Language is a key identifier, but most Polynesians

under 30 years of age do not speak a Polynesian language, and identity for many of them lies in knowing key words and phrases, some songs and terms associated with important customary practices ...” (Croccombe 2001, 152) This is especially true for the foreign-born. According to Crocombe (2001, 107): “The 1996 census revealed that only one in five Cook Islanders living in New Zealand still spoke the Cook Islands language.” As one of the CINVAS members told me, “I understand about cultural dislocation.” Insecure about their own place in the culture, the foreign-born Maori are the most sensitive to boundary maintenance, trying to hold the line very tightly just outside of the area that they themselves occupy. The fluidity of symbolic meanings makes boundary marking especially tricky.

The foreign-born Cook Islands artists are not the only ones engaged in this type of cultural policing. One artist who has been endeavoring to educate himself in Cook Islands traditional culture says that the older generation is also engaged in boundary marking *against* their New Zealand born extended family members. “They don’t *want* to pass on the culture. But it’s your culture, even if you have to go to the library and look it up.”

The ability to speak Cook Islands Maori becomes a key tipping point in boundary marking. For the foreign-born Cook Islanders, the emphasis on speaking the language “misses the point”; for the local born, it is the basic cultural identifier. One of the much younger locally born, raised and educated artists made precisely this point in reference to the CINVAS members:

But all of these people, they’re coming here from New Zealand—they don’t know what it means to live here. They don’t *really* understand. They don’t speak our language. Oh, [one CINVAS member] may know some words, but if you talk to him you find out that he doesn’t know the language. When people talk to him, they talk in English. Everyone talks in English.

On the other hand, one of the foreign born and educated artists discussed feeling “caught in the middle. The European [i.e., white] artists don’t like us because we’ve been educated, too—we can stand up to them. No one before could do that. But the indigenous artists resent us because we aren’t traditional.” The same person said, in another interview,

I’m tired of apologizing to my [extended] family [on Rarotonga] for where I was born. I’m tired of apologizing for not speaking their language—that our parents spoke English to us. They weren’t bad people—that was just the way it was. I’m tired of apologizing for it and I won’t do it anymore.

The legitimacy of the letter writers was further undermined by the return of Ian George to the country and his public support of Merkena. George was born of Cook Islands parents in New Zealand, where he was also raised and educated. Nevertheless, he has a high place within the artistic hierarchy on Rarotonga for several reasons. First, he has a Master’s Degree in Fine Arts (one of only a small

number of people living in the very title-conscious Cook Islands to hold an M.A. in any field) and is considered to be formally extremely knowledgeable about Maori culture. Second, his extended family is a very prominent Cook Islands family and he is related to many unequivocally “legitimate” Cook Islanders—including Mike Tavioni. Third, he is employed as the head of Arts Education for the school system and is therefore seen as the protector of traditional culture for the next generation. George’s name was typed in the signatures on the copy of the letter that was printed in the *Cook Islands Herald*, but his signature was not written next to it and he was known to be out of the country when the letter was sent.

Merkens notes that George and his wife, along with Tavioni and Nia, were very supportive of her at the time of the controversy. Although Merkens says that she was seldom invited to art world social functions, the Georges insisted that Merkens and her husband attend an opening at their gallery just at the height of the bad feeling. As Merkens tells the story of that evening: “We just stood there stiff. It was very uncomfortable. These were all these people who had just been attacking us—saying these things.” Mike Tavioni made a speech during the opening alluding to the controversy without mentioning Merkens by name. He drew on the imagery of one of the paintings on display—a bunch of crabs trying to crawl out of a bucket. “He said, ‘This is what you artists are like, trying to pull each other back down into the bucket. That’s what crabs in a bucket do—they are all trying to get out and they end up pulling each other down. We should be trying to help each other up instead.’”

Competition and Productivity

This line of critique appeared in another letter to the editor of the *Cook Islands News* (1 March 2002, 4) regarding the Merkens controversy:

... If the local artists want to get their artwork out, why don’t they use the expat examples and do it like they are?

Competition is meant to be good or do they want to ride the horse’s back forever?

I’m really disappointed in my fellow countrymen to run a good thing down when they probably have not tried themselves. Typical. See something turned into a success so kill it! What a shame.

Disappointed Local

This letter touches on two important themes. The first is the idea that the ideology of group equality has as its dark side the inability for individuals to achieve to their own fullest potential without rousing the ire of jealous others. The second issue is that of local artistic production—or rather, the lack of it. This is a theme that came up repeatedly in my interviews—from gallery owners and artists, from those

opposed to the letter writers and from some of the letter writers themselves. One former business owner, born and raised in the Cook Islands, explained in detail the frustrations of finding supply to meet demand for arts and crafts:

Say you have this shop and you want to sell some [hand-woven rito*] hats from Manihiki [one of the Northern group famed for the beauty of its weaving]. But you can't get any because the Tere* party [traditional traveling group] from Rakahanga [a neighboring island] is coming, so for two months before that nobody is making any hats because they are all cleaning their houses and planting and getting ready for the Tere. And any hats they do make, you can't have because they are all for gifts for the Tere, so they will have something to give them. Then no one makes any hats for two months because the Tere is there and they are all too busy entertaining them. Then after they leave, everyone has to clean up and recover from that. And then the Christmas holidays are coming up and every woman on Manihiki has to have four hats for Christmas—one for Christmas Day and one for Christmas Eve and so on. So you can't get any hats before Christmas. But then after Christmas you can buy all those hats that have only been worn once. I always tell everyone to buy the hats just after Christmas. But what about the six months before that? You've got all this demand—more demand for hats than the women from Manihiki could ever fill. I never *promise* anyone a hat. But if I can get some hats from somewhere else—and they only cost five dollars instead of 150 dollars—and the people buying the hats are never going to wear them except when they are here [visiting Rarotonga] anyway—tell me, what am I going to do?

Even one of the CINVAS members reiterated this point, noting that the two major outlets for Tangaroa carvings on the island both hire full time carvers to “churn out” carvings to meet the tourist demand:

[A shop owner] says, ‘I’ve hired full-time carvers. I know they’re not very good, but I’m hoping they’ll acquire the skills in time.’ I used to think the carving was horrible trash, but now I understand it. You can’t get local people to do anything; they won’t produce anything. You pay them for a carving this week and you expect it next week—not six months down the road.

A local woman who is known for her charitable activities has stopped supporting local artists:

Michael Tavioni used to call me up and say, ‘Here is this person who is so talented—you put in some money and I’ll put in some money and we’ll get him some paints and brushes and materials.’ We did that with four different people and then I told him, ‘Don’t you ask me for any more money because not *one* of these people that we’ve helped has produced anything!’

Merkens herself says that she never intended to make prints of her paintings, but that the demand for them from tourists pushed her there. "I could never paint enough originals to keep up with the demand for pictures." It is the selling of prints of her paintings that has turned out to be so lucrative, but which also raises the eyebrows of one of the letter signers, who told her that she should not make copies of her work: "Each copy loses some of the mana of the original until all your mana is gone. But I come from a different background; I don't have to worry about mana." The Maori artists do worry about mana; it is essential to their identity. Indigenous artists, then, likely feel hemmed in by cultural constraints from which foreign artists are infuriatingly free. "That's why the shops sell all this stuff from Java," she says.

Competition from massive arts and crafts producers like China and Indonesia have a strong effect not only on the supplies of arts and crafts in the Cooks, but also on the supplies of "Pacific" products marketed around the world. Under the headline "Pacific handicrafts up against Asian giants for a slice of NZ market," Charles Pitt (21 December 2002, 23) writes:

... China and Indonesia have a virtual stranglehold when it comes to exporting wooden and woven products to NZ. ... China and Indonesia between them have 80% of the NZ market where wooden items are concerned. Pacific countries have less than 0.1% share of the market. ... [T]here are few retail outlets for Pacific Island Crafts and virtually no established wholesale distribution system. ... [T]here is limited appreciation generally of Pacific Island art and craft. Few buyers are willing to pay the price artists feel their work deserves. NZ people are more likely to buy crafts from lower cost producing countries such as China and Indonesia.

In response to this situation, the Cook Islands Development Investment Board has put in place policies designed to help Cook Islanders carve out a niche market based on higher quality goods, with the Cook Islands brand merchandise bearing the logo "Trade Cook Islands." "People will be able to approach the DIB to use the Logo on their products but those products will first need to meet certain quality standards and there needs to be *consistency of product supply*." (C. Pitt, 14 December 2002, 9, emphasis added) Moreover, by law all businesses in the Cooks must be at least 51 percent owned by native Cook Islanders, a measure designed to protect the local populace from the economic incursions of foreigners. It was the violation of the spirit, if not exactly the letter, of this law by Merkens that initially prompted the NVAA letter writers to take action.

Former Prime Minister Sir Thomas Davis comes from a somewhat different perspective, arguing that Cook Islanders are very energetic and hard-working, but are prevented from being very productive from two sources: poverty and restrictions (both formal and informal) on competition. "When you're trying to figure out a way to eat, you're not particularly interested in sitting around carving little things. You don't have the time for that." He sees the arrival of the tourist

market (dating from the opening of the Rarotonga airport in 1974) as doing an enormous amount to help end poverty, but, as an ardent believer that the lure to productivity lies in the free market, he finds that the protectionism of government policies “make it too hard to get anything started.” Productivity is further eroded by cultural norms of communitarianism.

This line of reasoning about the constraints on artistic production echoes arguments put forward during the nineteenth century to explain the Cook Islanders’ infamous lack of productivity in agriculture and other economic ventures.

One of the greatest mistakes of the European merchants was to assume that commercial opportunities and credit would encourage the islanders to cultivate their land more intensively. ... In 1893 [Resident F.J.] Moss ... concluded that most islanders ... could not retain all the fruits of their labor [owing to its redistribution throughout the extended family network]. This discouraged the planting of cash crops. ... Another important aspect of the islanders’ indolence was, in Moss’s view, the obligations of the individual to his kinsmen: ‘...[The family] gives refuge to all, and under it there cannot be pauperism, which is an inestimable gain. But this family communism kills energy and enterprise in a people naturally clever and adventurous, and while it lasts no adequate material progress can be expected.’ (Gilson 1980, 82–83)

Seen from the western point of view, there is a *lack*, a shortcoming, in the Cook Islands way of operating. But from a Cook Islands point of view, the emphasis on family and community rather than on productivity and private accumulation is at the heart of The Polynesia Way.* It is precisely these communitarian social norms that have led to the development of Cook Islands art in the first place. As Crocombe notes (2001, 174), “Pacific people are at a disadvantage. Their cultures predispose them to relatively low efficiency of time utilization, high rates of distribution, and inefficient capital accumulation.” On the other hand, as Becker makes clear (1982, 93–4), “... because they are in business, distributors want to rationalize the relatively unstable and erratic production of ‘creative’ work ...” The two different ideological systems run headlong into conflict in the face of (a) large-scale tourist demand for “authentic” art works, (b) a non-Maori group of producers who have few cultural constraints on their output, and (c) an indigenous culture that is very much at odds with the whole system of capitalist enterprise.

To add to the tensions, the foreign-born and educated Cook Islands descendants, caught in the middle of two competing ideologies, are torn by their internal conflicts. As Farrell (2001, 52) writes about the psychological aspects of this trap:

In *The Masterpiece* Zola describes several group meetings in which the members attack a second type of boundary marker—the backsliding conservative or ‘sellout,’ a member who waters down the principles of the group in order to produce more conventional and marketable paintings. ... As the members became more and more desperate to sell paintings, this role must have become

particularly salient, for the sellout represented a direction that many were tempted to go.

One of the most prominent of the leading-edge Rarotongan painters, faced with the financial realities of supporting his family on the proceeds from his artwork specifically referred to Merkens and noted that, “One minute I’m flush and then 30 minutes later, I’m broke again.¹ If things don’t pick up, I may have to go that way [selling prints of his work].” Fully aware of the loss of prestige among his peers and loss of mana in his culture, this artist may soon find that he has no other economic options available to him if he wants to continue to pursue artwork full time.

“Maori-ness” for Sale

Questions about the supply of art lead inevitably to questions about the demand for art. Asking for whom the art is made leads to questions about the desires of the audience. The foreign-born and -educated artists look almost exclusively to foreign buyers, whereas many of the local-born and -educated produce much more for a local market. One of the anti-Merkens letter writers was quite concise: “The tourists finance what I do here.” With regard to the recent wave of art being produced by educated Maori artists (as opposed to artisans), One art world says: “You will find, if you look across the whole South Pacific region, that the only places that have this flowering of the arts are the ones with tourists. Tourists *are* the market.”

Linnekin (1990, 159) discusses this process as it occurs across the Pacific, especially as regards the resurgence of “traditional” art forms, but notes that the process is not exactly the same in different contexts:

Enactments of traditional performances, rites, and art forms are common in Oceania today. ... These invocations of the past are not simply motivated by nostalgia for its own sake, but must be understood within their social and political context. Traditional reenactments function somewhat differently for Hawaiians, Maori, and Australian Aborigines than for Pacific Islanders who have won political autonomy. Subordinated Pacific Islanders invoke traditional culture in contradistinction to that of the dominant colonial society; for the new nations of the Pacific, traditional reenactments play a crucial role in constructing a national identity out of indigenous diversity.

Although Linnekin is concerned primarily with the reenactments of traditional practices, especially performance arts, for the benefit of public consumption, the

1 The artist laughed at this point. His wife, who was present for this part of the interview, immediately said, “I don’t think it’s very funny!”

same arguments could hold for the production of more privately viewed plastic arts. The selling of artworks on Rarotonga is not an unproblematic commercial transaction, but a recursive process that affects locals as well as foreigners. The construction of “Cook Islands Art” for the tourists is closely tied with the construction of “Cook Islands Identity” for the local population. Thinking of Bourdieu’s arguments about the workings of the field, we can see that these definitions, whichever ones are consecrated with the art world, will legitimate some sectors of the field and de-legitimate others. And that legitimization will spill out into the field of power.

Especially when marketing with both eyes looking to a non-local audience, “Maori-ness” becomes a very valuable commodity—a commodity whose value increases not only with scarcity, but also as its legitimate authenticity becomes verifiable for an increasingly savvy tourist market. Thus it is not surprising to find the non-local Maori artists working hard to set up boundaries to keep other artists out of the group of *legitimate* “Cook Islands artists.” Recall one of the chief complaints in the letter: “Some expatriate artists have gone so far as to refer to themselves as ‘Cook Islands artists’.” But, as Becker notes (1982, 354), “... the works get their value from being made by unusual people, of whom there are not many.” There is a fine line to be walked between increasing productivity and maintaining a scarcity of people who can legitimately produce art. A local gallery owner told me that the tourists are starting to become much more sophisticated in their art buying habits: “It used to be that they would just snatch up anything,” but now they are much more concerned with “authenticity,” and “quality.”

The necessity of finding “real” Cook Islands artists is plain to gallery and shop owners. One local self-taught artist began his painting career at the explicit urging of a gallery owner for whom he was working in another capacity. “All these paintings are by papa’a* [white/foreign] painters and the tourists would say, ‘Don’t you have anything for sale by Cook Islanders?’ So he said to me, ‘Why don’t you paint something?’” The gallery owner then provided painting materials and paid time off work so that his employee could try his hand at painting. At the time of my research, he had been painting for about two years and was producing some of the most innovative and exciting artwork on the island. His imagery is unmistakably “authentic” Cook Islands to the point of being almost anthropological. He says of the foreigners who are the vast majority of the buyers of his paintings: “They always want to know what it is all about and I have to come out and explain it all to them. I don’t mind; I want them to understand what it all means.” No doubt, these informal discussions with the artist are an important part of the allure of the artwork for the buyers.

As Becker (1982, 213) writes: “The people and organizations who distribute art works make editorial choices when they refuse to distribute some works, require changes in others before distribution, or (most subtly) create a network of facilities and a body of practice which lead artists in the world whose works they distribute to make works that fit easily into that scheme.” The materials to produce artworks are extremely costly in the Cook Islands—doubly so to more traditional islanders

who are enmeshed in kinship networks that soak up much of the proceeds from the cash economy that they earn. The provision of art materials to potential artists who are most likely to make artworks “that fit easily into that scheme” of “legitimate” Cook Islands art is perhaps done less subtly than Becker had envisioned. We can see here the genesis of the “real” Cook Islands art world, not only in the provision of materials, but also in the determination of an aesthetic. “... [T]he pioneers also begin to construct the rudiments of an art world—networks of suppliers, distribution facilities, and collegial groups in which aesthetic questions can be argued, standards proposed, and work evaluated ...” (Becker 1982, 320)

Aesthetic questions in the Cooks often, inevitably, revolve around issues of ethnic legitimacy. One local artist, who had educated himself through books about a wide area of European art history told me, “I pinch from Western artists who pinched from us [Pacific people], but not from anyone else.” Engaged in boundary marking around legitimate authenticity, this self-taught artist had set up for himself strict rules about where he could let himself be influenced. Matisse’s cutouts, for example, he felt were inspired by the bold graphic designs of the *tivaevae* and were therefore legitimate as sources of inspiration for his own work. He had abandoned, however, earlier artistic ideas that he found in his study of German Expressionism. Becker (1982, 135) notes that these types of distinctions are not trivial: “The heat in discussions of aesthetics usually exists because what is being decided is not only an abstract philosophical question but also some allocation of valuable resources.” The resources are not only financial (this artist’s canvasses sell for between CI\$1000 and CI\$5000 each—an enormous amount in a country where the average annual income is around CI\$10,000), of course, but are more importantly about symbolic capital—the capital of being a “real” Cook Islander.

The “authenticity factor” plays heavily into the appeal of the islands for the outside tourist consumers, a fact that is not lost on business people, tourist boards, or governments across the South Pacific. Crocombe (2001, 166–67) writes:

... Reality is minimized. The artificial myth of exotica which validates the purchase of status which is a key element of tourism, is fulfilled in the presentation of pseudo-traditional performances, the ‘evidence’ of cross-cultural contact in ‘native’ handicrafts manufactured in the Philippines, and in polychrome postcards.

The Programme of Tourist Development for French Polynesia emphasized that the arriving tourist ‘has a preconceived notion of this tropical paradise ... and is not so forgiving where he is wrong in the image of the islands and their people.’ If a distinctive cultural pattern for visitor reception does not exist, it stated, one should be created to persuade the visitor that ‘this is indeed the vacation paradise of his dreams.’ All employees having contact with tourists had to be ‘well indoctrinated in the philosophy of hospitality’ and the ‘promotion and indoctrination’ of a unique image is to be given top priority, for ‘the *product* must match the *image*.’ [Their italics.]

American Samoa went a step further when the government-owned television service, beamed compulsorily into all classrooms as part of the school curriculum, used to indoctrinate children in the ‘need’ and the ways for them to behave as tourists had been led to expect. The Tongan Visitors Bureau published a booklet to give school children and adults information on Tongan culture and customs to tell to tourists.

Ironically, the Miss South Pacific theme for the 2002 pageant (held on Rarotonga) was “I wear *your* smile [emphasis added].”

It is important to note, however, that “authenticity” and “identity” for Cook Islanders may in fact be created in opposition to *papa’a*. Thomas sees this process happening across the Pacific (1991, 207):

...Pacific Islanders have used selective constructs of other societies as foils for explicit models of their own sociality ... The histories of cultures in the Pacific Islands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been marked, above all, by this process of rendering local practice explicit through politicized juxtaposition to whatever is taken to be European custom, whatever stands as ‘foreign.’

In creating the “otherness” of the *papa’a* artists on the island, as well as of the tourists, Cook Islanders were in a sense creating themselves.

The Copyright Lawsuit

The letter writers had made the mistake of appearing financially greedy in the eyes of a community that values generosity above all else. In one of the last newspaper articles devoted to the controversy, appearing a month after the first story of the letter, the *Cook Islands Star*, under the headline “Art, for art’s sake: Strange letters of protest from artists who should know better,” the author wrote (n.a. 22 March 2002, 14): “There are also suggestions that the protest is little more than a personal vendetta against one foreign artist who refused to sell her copyright cheaply to a local dealer and artist.” What the newspapers failed to mention was that the Development Investment Board had asked the local dealer to enter into a business arrangement with Merkens expressly in order to bring her gallery into line with the 51 percent law.

In the media, there had been no positive support for the initial letter or for its authors. The letter writers felt betrayed and misunderstood. One of them said to me, “I’m not a racist—although I’ve been slandered as one.” They saw themselves as championing a threatened culture only to be accused of illegitimacy and selfishness—by the very people whom they were trying to help, no less. Their next step, therefore, was to develop the cultural side of the argument further, tackling head-on the issues of cultural expropriation and exploitation. In this phase of the controversy, Merkens was sued for copyright infringement. This

tactic was interesting in that it brought forward very explicitly the arguments over intellectual property—specifically the use of particular images and types of images by particular groups of artists. This is an explicit step away from traditional ideas of mana and towards Western ideas involving property rights for economic, rather than spiritual, gain. As such, it ironically signals a shift in Rarotongan cultural away from *traditional ideas* in an attempt to preserve *traditional cultural forms*.

Because there are no newspaper accounts or other publicly available sources of information, the question of what exactly transpired among all of the participants depends on the source of the information. The painting that is the focus of the lawsuit shows an elderly Maori woman, Vaine Arapai Taripo, standing to the left side and in front of a colorful flower-patterned tivaevae which is hanging by clothes pins from a clothes line. The woman is wearing a dark blue dress and a white woven hat and is smiling.

According to Merkens, she photographed the woman and many of her tivaevae. Mrs Taripo and her family were supposedly all very pleased with the painting. Merkens then made prints of the painting and sold them.

According to a CINVAS member, however, Mrs Taripo was “stunned to find her face being sold all over the island.” On behalf of the Taripo family, the CINVAS member investigated the means to sue Merkens for copyright violation for using the woman’s face without written consent, but was surprised to discover that there is no copyright ownership of a face under Cook Islands law. They then shifted tactics to suing over the use of the tivaevae design as “intellectual property.” This leads to a larger discussion of the rights of certain groups to the exclusive use of certain cultural symbols. Recall the wording of the original letter: “As ethnic Cook Islanders we find it offensive that foreigners are using our intellectual property (in the form of tivaivai, carving and tattoo motifs and traditional images, eg Tangaroa) in their artwork.” Unresolved questions rapidly mounted: What counts as “intellectual property”? Can one individual claim “property rights” over images and motifs common in a culture? Can a *group* of people lay exclusive claim to certain images or *types* of images? Who gets to define who is and who is not a legitimate member of the group? How are the images and the types of images that are off-limits to others to be chosen? In a global art market, how will this be policed? How can members of an embattled culture themselves use the images in innovative ways without incurring the ire of the traditionalists within the culture whose concern is with preservation? How can outsiders? Is art, by its interpretive nature as an often intensely personal reflection on the social and cultural surroundings of the artist, destructive of traditional cultures? If not, how can personal interpretation (by either insiders or outsiders) co-exist with preservation of the traditional understandings? Is it even possible to limit the outsider’s personal reflections on the culture without limiting, or even prohibiting, contact between the outsiders and the culture? Is the issue of prohibiting the use of traditional motifs and images by outsiders being used as a straw man to divert attention from real matters of culture loss—such as the lack of post-secondary education on the island and the resulting population drain to New Zealand? The

issue of *group* rights is especially complicated by the all-important problems in deciding who is a “real Maori” or who is a “real Cook Islander.”

Merkens’s status as a non-Maori foreigner, as much as her use of the tivaevae pattern, is most likely a key ingredient in the suit here. Problems with individual (and collective) “intellectual property” are much easier to handle within the boundaries of a community all of whose members, through informal normative control, can be counted on to act, for the most part, within the understood limits.

In *The Art of Tivaevae*, Rongokea (2001, 12) writes:

Designs of a particular taunga [master tivaevae maker] are usually recognizable and are sometimes copied ... Some women are not willing for anyone outside the family to copy their designs, however most taunga feel quite honoured when others copy their patterns once the tivaevae is finished and exhibited. It would be annoying only if a woman claimed a pattern to be her own. (2001, 12)

Cultural sharing had been the norm within the small communities where the prestige of being copied was easily understood and acknowledged by the intimate local group. Economic gain, after all, played little part in the manufacture of tivaevae until very recently. Taunga status is partly the result of being an acknowledged leader in a field by other members of the community—and of being capable of sharing knowledge and skills with others. As one tivaevae maker, Grace Ngaputa, told Rongokea (2001, 85), “I don’t like to show anyone my patterns until I’ve finished sewing the tivaevae. After that I don’t mind women copying. I feel proud. I think when you share like that it helps you get new ideas for yourself.” To be acknowledged as a taunga is to be accorded high symbolic capital within the community. The meaning and importance of copying is bound up with the type of status hierarchy—symbolic vs economic—being used in the society. *Symbolic capital is gained by being copied by an insider; economic capital is lost by being copied by an outsider.* The rise of issues surrounding the use of intellectual property indicate a shift in the type of currency (status vs money, or symbolic capital vs economic capital) used by the community. Moreover, cultural sharing is much less problematic when the results cannot be seen as usurpation of cultural forms by outsiders who have shown a long history of misunderstanding, denigrating, and destroying the cultures that they take over. Over the centuries, Cook Islanders have learned well the costs that can come from allowing foreigners access to their culture.

Merkens explicitly argues that, in her case, the concerns about intellectual property are tied to economic motives: “[The CINVAS member] wanted to pay me back” for refusing to be an exclusive contractor for the sale of her paintings in a CINVAS member’s shop. “She was making a lot of money off me—more than I was making. She had this big contract that she wanted me to sign. I wouldn’t have been able to paint a thing without her permission. I said ‘no’ to that.” Merkens saw attempts to limit her use of traditional imagery not as cultural preservation, but as simple greed. The perception that the protection of cultural symbols was for more

than monetary reasons was not helped by a lawyer for the case who, in a moment of inebriated public indiscretion, reportedly told several people, “Oh, yes, we’re going to get some money out of that Andi Merkens!” This unfortunate behavior managed to detract from interesting and substantive points that the foreign-educated artist elites tried to make regarding cultural preservation. In an email to another artist, one of the signers of the original letter wrote:

As artists we too recognize it is a good thing to share and learn from each other but our letter was not just about art—it was more about preserving that which makes Maori different from the rest of the world. Globalisation may have some good points but it also waters down cultures so that eventually they all become the same. ... As a people who are feeling dispossessed, ours is not an unusual reaction. We don’t want to wait until we are totally dispossessed before we try to do something about it—a situation New Zealand Maoris find themselves in today.

As this email makes clear, the original letters writers were politically informed by indigenous rights movements happening all over the globe, particularly in New Zealand where the letter writers were educated. In attempting to re-capture symbolic capital for local *tivaevae* makers and, by extension, for themselves, they had no option but to pursue economic gain, a much less satisfying goal. The modern world has infiltrated the local community too deeply for the Cook Islanders to be able to go back to the currency of a prestige-based system of hierarchy. It is a striking irony that while Rarotongan artists are attempting to make the transition from economic capital to cultural capital as the source of their legitimacy and status, they must pass through an area of intense conflict over money. As Thomas (1991, 198) notes with regard to Fijian culture:

[H]ere I am more concerned with the way in which the instability of things which could be either commodities or exchange valuables and the compelling image of alternate paths permit Fijians to translate a sense that they are ‘poor’ and handicapped in commerce into a sense of moral superiority. This is why ‘price’ becomes the appropriate reduction of a complex series of gifts.

The initial letter writers could almost be taking a page directly from their Fijian cousins. The *moral* superiority asserted by the artists who opposed Merkens could only be validated in terms of the *economic* marketplace—only by putting a price on what Merkens had taken could the Maori artists validate the indigenous non-economic view of the world.

The copyright suit eventually ran out of steam and when her husband’s teaching contract expired at the end of that year, Merkens closed her gallery. She and her family moved back to New Zealand where she intended to continue pursuing her career as an artist—“There are a lot of opportunities there if I just focus on Pacific art.” The expatriate artists recognize the unequivocal career opportunities of their

new aesthetic idiom. Said one: "I wish I had some Maori blood, but I don't," regarding the large number of images and forms that whites "are not supposed to paint." For some artists, Maori heritage can boil down to nothing more than a very lucrative selling point. But like the marketing of Rarotonga as "a cheap Tahiti," this is ultimately self-defeating as buyers increasingly seek "authenticity."

Non-Maori artists have the means to use and exploit the imagery of the Pacific islands, but in doing so, participate in the swamping of a fragile culture, in the delegitimation of their own art, and in the inevitable misrepresentation that outsiders produce of another world. Indigenous artists, on the other hand, have legitimate claims to the imagery and the lived understanding of their culture, but are faced with almost insurmountable cultural and economic obstacles to producing sustained bodies of work. And, as the incident of the original letter about Merkens shows, the foreign-born and educated Maori descendants are caught in the middle, resented by both sides. This process is being played out all across the Pacific. Linnekin (1990, 153) writes:

[S]ocial context and environment are more important than ancestry in the construction of cultural identities among native Pacific peoples. ... Ascriptions of identity made by rural villagers may differ from those of urban intellectuals, who are typically in the vanguard of political movements ...

Finally, two months after she left the Cook Islands, Merkens's gallery re-opened under the auspices of a Cook Islands woman, Jolene Bosanquet. The gallery still chiefly featured Merkens's work, but now also included "... the Edwin Shorter Collection of prints and cards as well as the popular 'Pearls of the Pacific' video ... " The newspaper article announcing the reopening made no mention of the controversy that had surrounded Merkens, now in New Zealand, during her time on Rarotonga. Instead, the new owner is enthusiastically quoted (n.a. 10 March 2003, 4):

And after the first week how does she feel? 'I just love it.'

Andi's vibrant work makes for delightful memories of the Cook Islands for visitors, she says. Customers are also local residents buying either for themselves or for gifts and accommodators/cafes wanting to brighten up their walls with Cook Islands art.

Brief as it is, the article is far from innocuous. Calling Merkens's work "Cook Islands art" is now a loaded statement.

Two years after the original letter was written, the subject of the lawsuit painting, Vaine Arapai Taripo, was honored by the Rarotongan Beach Resort and Spa in March 2004 for her contributions to the art of tivaevae making. The news release commemorating the event read in part:

[T]he resort's public spaces along with all resort guest rooms and suites feature vibrant local artworks. One of the art works featured in the guestrooms includes a painting by Andi Merkens showing Mama Taripo standing in front of one of her most cherished tivaevae, made exactly 50 years ago. The painting celebrates the unique tradition of tivaevae-making in the Cook Islands by its talented women, and The Rarotongan was proud and delighted to present Mama Taripo with a framed copy in recognition of her wonderful contribution to the art.

Mrs Taripo's reaction to the gift is not recorded in the press release.

The Destruction of the Graveyard

The cultural activists had much better success—at least in popular opinion—when they left the field of high culture and concentrated instead on the more “archaeological” field of preservation of physical culture of national historical significance. Two of the letter signers were at the forefront of a sharp and serious debate concerning the preservation of Cook Islands historical monuments—indeed, Eruera “Ted” Nia was in large part responsible for saving from destruction the historic graveyard surrounding the Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC) in Avarua, the capital village of the Cooks.

The incident began on Monday, 31 March 2003, when workers for the T&M Heather Company, under the direction of the CICC Reverend Mata Makara began preparations to bulldoze down graves in the cemetery surrounding the church building. The bulldozing itself began on April 1. Nia, who lives across a small road from the church noticed the activity and went to the churchyard. In a heated exchange with Makara, Nia managed to get work stopped for the day. The *Cook Islands News* report (Carr, 2 April 2003, 1) on the next day read:

‘It’s a blatant desecration of burial ground. He has no right. No one has the right to destroy this, no one. I want it stopped ... no more.’

Emotions ran high for Eruera ‘Ted’ Nia who stopped work at the Avarua Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC) grounds yesterday that would have resulted in the old graves located on the inland side of the church being bulldozed and then covered.

Work began on Monday this week in an effort to beautify the church burial grounds ...

Pleas from the CICC Reverend Mata Makara had gone on unheard for far too long for families of those who are buried to come and clean up the graves. T&M Heather workers eventually packed up and left the area just after 12:30 pm as heated discussions between Rev Makara and Nia continued.

The response from the community was immediate and overwhelming. Letters to the editor in the daily newspaper began to appear by the next morning and the subject of the graveyard continued to dominate the letters section for the next two weeks. The

first letter to appear was from one of the local artists, Tim Buchanan, a prominent member of CINVAS (although not a signer of the Merkens letter.) He wrote (3 April 2003, 4):

... I was further amazed at the arrogance, insensitivity and sheer stupidity displayed by the Reverend on the CITV news item. The man was totally unaware of the consequences of his actions. ...

What has happened here is a serious offense in other civilized countries and it should be here.

Parliament must somehow protect what is left of our early history before the cretins destroy it all. But then most of our MPs are cretins themselves who lack the knowledge, let alone the will to do what is right. Jesus wept.

Tim Buchanan

Turangi

The other letter to appear that day was also from a member of the art world, fabric artist and clothing designer Ellena Tavioni, Mike Tavioni's cousin. Her letter is different from Buchanan's in a couple of interesting ways. First is her use of the Maori language, a clear signal of indigenous legitimacy. The second is her reference to her geneological right to comment on the matter by mentioning her Makea family connection. The Makea family has been, since the arrival of the first Europeans, the most prominent of all the seven ngati, controlling the land where the largest natural harbor on the island, Avarua, is located. It was the Makea family that originally gave the land on which the church and the graveyard are located.

How disrespectful and cheeky! ...

Their actions have really determined their Christian characters and I have nothing nice to say about any of them.

As children we were taught not to play or walk over these graves. We learnt at a young age to respect all graves and this teaching was promoted by the church itself!

Where did all these orometua* [preachers] and deacons come from?

Te akama ia kotou e to kotou ngakau viivii! [All of your disgusting entrails fester!]

Yours sincerely,

Ellena Tavioni.

A member of the Makea family

On 4 April 2003, the Makea family organized a protest march that attracted over a hundred people. The protest had now clearly spread far beyond the boundaries of the art world and was embraced by Cook Islanders from many segments of the community, albeit with art world members playing key roles. Although one

anonymous writer to the “Smoke Signals” section of the daily paper questioned Nia’s genealogical fitness to act as a spokesperson for the Makea family,² by and large, there was none of the rancor directed at the arts community over its actions that was seen in the Merkens incident. In fact, Jean Mason, who came in for a some censure by the local media with regard to her actions and writings at that time, wrote a two full page feature story about the history of the CICC graveyard that appeared in the April 12 weekend paper and mobilized even more widespread support for halting the bulldozing. Despite the rapidly rising tide of outrage, however, Reverend Makara nevertheless planned to continue with the bulldozing, as the *Cook Islands News* reported on Saturday (Carr, 5 April 2003, 1):

Work will continue on the graves at the Avarua Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC) today to clear graves that were leveled on Tuesday morning.

This is according to Reverend Mata Makara who says the work will be carried out on the graves on the inland side of the church ...

On Tuesday, this week work was stopped after protests by Eruera (Ted) Nia.

Nia, who lives next door to the church, is also a descendant of Makea who gave the piece of land to the mission.

Yesterday, many joined him in venting their anger at the clearing of all the old graves on the seaside side of the church ...

‘They have contributed to our history and we have no right to ever forget it. All graves in the church yard have always been a part of the church,’ said [Ellena] Tavioni.

She called on the church to preserve the history, do the right thing, and restore the precious graves.

By the following Monday, however, the uproar had reached such a level that the church leaders had no alternative but to halt the work temporarily. Interestingly, they chose at this point to consult with traditional leaders and to prominently announce the fact that they were doing so—possibly because they found themselves under the same type of attack that the CINVAS members had faced the previous year. Their in-group legitimacy was being questioned. The newspaper article accompanying this decision was no longer quoting art world members, although Tim Buchanan’s name does appear in the story, now with the addition of his Maori middle name, Manavaroa. In the caption for the accompanying photograph, Buchanan’s ethnic standing is bolstered by reference to his ancestor’s grave. Whereas the previous year, the members of CINVAS had not been considered “real” Cook Islanders, in the issue of the graveyard, they are given all the markers of ethnic legitimacy that had been withheld before. Moreover, the church leaders are criticized not only for not being Maori but also for not behaving in the way that English people

2 “One signaller says, concerning to the grave controversy at Avarua CICC, that Ted Nia has no Makea title and his mother had no Makea title. ‘How come he thinks he can dictate to an entire CICC congregation of Cook Islanders who only want to beautify their church grounds,’ says the resident.” (Smoke Signals 4 April 2003, 4)

behave, harking back to Buchanan's original reference to how things are done in "civilized" countries (Carr, 7 April 2003, 1).

The Avarua Cook Islands Christian church will consult with traditional leaders before making a decision on whether to continue with work in the church's graveyard ...

'Do not expect any respect from us anymore. It took a hundred years to build my history and my history went away in two hours, and I don't appreciate that.' [said Doreen Kavana-Boggs.]

'I am appalled by what has happened here. I can't imagine anybody, say in England where they have cathedrals that are older than this with their old graves that are unmarked, maybe crumbling. They have been there for eight or nine hundred years...they don't do this. And we do it to our own people. It's just shocking,' said Sonya Kamana who was one of around 100 people who turned up to the peaceful march past the yard.

Amongst those who joined in the march was Member of Parliament Tom Marsters and Tim Manavaroa Buchanan.

[photo caption: Tom Marsters (left) and Tim Buchanan stand at the site where the grave of one of their ancestors was situated.]

Letters to the editor continued to pour in, coming even from New Zealand where the local Cook Islands community was outraged over what they had heard over the radio. The following letter (Apai, 7 April 2003, 4) is one of the first public calls for the removal of Reverend Makara and one of the first to publicly challenge his right to belong to the community. He is noted as not being from Rarotonga, as being an outsider. And in the Polynesian tradition, his punishment is to be exiled from the community.

Ratio Matariki [a Maori radio station in New Zealand] fielded 28 telephone calls from the Cook Islands community on air live in the space of 75 minutes, all but one wanting the intended desecration of graves halted. ... A church minister in the true sense of the word will not destroy, but preserve, keep the peace and love which binds the people together. As for Orometua Makara he is far from it. He does not deserve to represent Christianity. He should be put on a vaka [boat] and sent back to the rock he came from.

Teariki Apai
Ratio Matariki
Wellington NZ

Finally, on 9 April 2003, a week after the first bulldozing, the paper announced (Carr, 9 April 2004, 1) that "The destruction of the graves in order to beautify the Avarua Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC) churchyard has been halted says the spokesperson of the project, Vakapora Mataiapo." Nevertheless, angry letters continued to flood the newspaper. In response to the only letter in support of the

bulldozing, Mrs Sela-Tera Apera Pori wrote the following letter (Pori, 10 April 2003, 4). Note the increasing use of Maori words and the further call to exile the Reverend from the community. Note especially the questioning of whether Makara and his deacons are “real Polynesians.”

Dear Editor,

Kia Orana, this is a reply to Teariki Simiona’s letter 5 April, Beautification project. ... To my understanding Teariki, beautification means—to make clean, to make beautiful NOT to destroy.

They destroyed our Christian heritage and our Ui Tupuna [our ancestors] ...

You are asking our young people not to speak out. What do you expect? The future is theirs and they have every right to do it and to demand an answer. Where will our people of tomorrow go in search of their past heritage?

... You are also asking for all to apologise to the orometua [preacher]—for what?

If he and his tiakono [deacons] are true Christians and real Polynesians—would they destroy those menema [graves] and heritage?

So, is it worth apologising? No! Of course we are tumu Kuki Airani [indigenous Cook Islanders], tumu Rarotongans in Christ, but your orometua is of a different vaka [kin group].

Like the others said—let him sail to where his vaka [a play on words as ‘vaka’ means both ‘canoe’ or ‘boat’ as well as ‘kin group’] came from, leave us Rarotongans to decide what to do. ...

Mrs Sela-Tera Apera Pori
Makea (Ngati Arera)

Just at this point, Tim Buchanan’s name appeared very prominently in the paper, again linked with Ted Nia, but for a different reason. At the CINVAS meeting, he was named as the Bank of the Cook Islands artist in residence, a position that had been held by Nia the previous year (C. Pitt, 12 April 2003, 28).

Tim Buchanan is the new Bank of the Cook Islands (BCI) artist in residence.

The announcement was made by BCI board member Gus Meyer on Tuesday afternoon, 8 April at a meeting of the Cook Islands National Visual Arts Society.

The residency is for three months and is worth \$7,500. ... Tim is the second recipient of the residency, Ted Nia being the first last year.

This same day, Mason’s article on the history of the graveyard appeared, effectively linking the artists, CINVAS, and historical preservation together in the public eye. Over a month passed quietly and then Reverend Makara appeared again in the

news, this time as a defendant in a civil action brought against him and three other church leaders by Nia (Carr, 24 May 2003, 1)

Avarua Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC) minister Mata Makara is one of four people who will make an appearance in the High Court on Wednesday next week to face charges of wilful damage. ...

The four are charged that on 31 March, 1 and 2 April they wilfully destroyed, damaged or modified or caused to be destroyed an archaeological site namely the Avarua Church yard cemetery and burial grounds.

The charges are filed under the Cultural and Historic Places Act 1994–1995.

Just a few days before the court day, the Reverend tried once again to finish the destruction of the graveyard and was once again stopped by Nia. The newspaper report of the incident (n.a., 24 May 2003, 4) reads:

Last Saturday further attempts to continue with the cemetery beautification programme were intervened by Ted Nia. A family member noticed a T and M Heather truck in the churchyard and alerted Nia who single handedly faced a group of men carrying out work. ...

Eyewitnesses told the Herald a heated argument erupted between Nia and church elder Kura Strickland. While the argument was in full swing a senior male member of the church pulled his pants down and bared his naked buttocks (Tipou pou toe) to Nia. ...

An eyewitness said the event that took place on Saturday was horrible. 'Many of the men were mocking Ted.' Another unnamed witness said, 'coming from the head of the CICC this has to be one of the lowest moments of the church.' They said what they heard and saw was 'heathenistic behaviour.'

'Ted's courage against a big group [of] cowards is one of the bravest acts I've seen for a long time,' said an eyewitness.

Although the Makea family ultimately lost the willful damage case against the Reverend on a technicality, the work on the graveyard was permanently halted and Reverend Makara lost an enormous amount of local backing and prestige. Nia, on the other hand, was publicly lauded as behaving in the manner of a true ariki, safeguarding the interests of the community. In the arena of cultural preservation, the artists were backed with support from the larger community. In this way, the Cook Islanders resemble the neo-traditionalists whom Thomas studied in Fiji. He notes, "[I]slanders seem to have become more traditional than they ever could have been before. Ironically, the models which anthropology imagined for pristine societies have been approximated through acculturation." (1991, 204)

Crocombe (2001, 168) writes that:

The Jean-Marie Tjibaou, leader of the independence movement in New Caledonia, and one of the Pacific's greatest dramatists and choreographers,

said, 'We have an overly archaeological conception of culture; the culture of the past is considered authentic, but ... contemporary creation must be proven to be authentic ...'

As the CINVAS artists discovered, championing the archaeological conception of culture can rouse community backing, while in-fights over contemporary art are losing propositions. While on the issue of the graveyard destruction the arts community stood together backed by the larger society, on the Merkens issue the Rarotongan art world fractured along fault lines of ethnicity, geography, and age. The conflicts over legitimacy of both artists and artworks reflects the fundamental transformation occurring in Cook Islands society—the changing nature of the basis of status. In the past, the social hierarchy was based on genealogy (inherited rank), mana (ascribed and achieved moral worth), and taunga status (achieved socially useful expertise.) In the traditional communities within which this system operated, generosity was the highest value and acts acquired moral worth to the degree that they were outward-directed. Economic capital played no role in legitimating one's place in the hierarchy—unless it was the negative one that private accumulation was considered shameful. But the social, demographic, and economic changes that have roiled Cook Islands society since the first European contact, and which have accelerated since the opening of the airport in 1974, have fatally undermined the traditional bases of status. The intertwining of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital has become apparent in the struggles to define legitimacy—both ethnic and artistic—within the art world and to police boundaries around claims of status. The social failure of the group of foreign-educated artists with regard to the Merkens controversy and the social success of those same artists with regard to the preservation of the old graveyard indicates that the Cook Islands art world—and the larger Cook Islands society—is still in the midst of a transition over the meaning and value of "Culture." The vitriol generated in each of these situations has produced enormous anxiety in the art world over not only what types of images are allowed or disallowed for certain artists' use, but also what types of identities are allowed or disallowed for the members of the art world and the larger society.

In the field of "culture," in the Bourdieuan sense, different groups struggle for legitimation. The artists act as strategists who attempt to validate rules (by which dominance is achieved) that conform to their own resources and strengths. This is the context within which artistic production, creativity, and innovation are occurring at this time in the Cooks. At the level of the individual artists, it is social capital—the social networks *structured* by these ideological conflicts—that plays a vitally important role in determining creativity and in shaping the artistic opportunities available to individual artists in the networks. In the next chapter, we will examine in detail the networks of solidarity and divisiveness that co-exist on Rarotonga and look at the ways in which these networks contribute to expanding artistic creativity.

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Chapter 5

The Artists II: Social Networks and Making Art¹

Looking more deeply at the network of relationships that the artists had with each other provides insights into how the group functioned together, even when the members of the art world seemed to be disconnected or even hostile to each other. During the course of the formal interviews with the artists, I asked each of them, “Who do you think (excluding yourself) are the three best artists on the island?” Originally, this question was intended merely to generate names for further interviews, but interesting patterns began to emerge from the responses. Because the question was posed and answered rather casually in the course of much longer interviews, the artists did not necessarily list precisely three others (responses ranged from one to four) and did not necessarily limit themselves to other artists on the island (for example, one listed a person on another island and one listed a former long time resident of the island who had since moved away to the US.) In the course of these discussions, the artists often evaluated their colleagues at some length and many of them also, unasked, made a point of then listing those whom they felt were the *worst* artists as well. All together, I was able to interview all but four of the local artists who were listed as “best” during the interviews. These four were excluded from the analysis since they did not, therefore, have a chance to make choices themselves. Gallery owners, tourism workers, government officials, and the like also generated some names, but their responses are not included here.

A total of 19 artists who participated in the formal interviews are included in this part of the analysis. These names were generated by six “fresh starts.” That is, in order to ensure that I was not limiting myself to one clique of artists, I contacted artists who had *not* been named by others. I found these artists through cold calls to their studios and galleries and through listings in travel/tourism guides. Though they had not been listed by others at the time I first contacted them, each of these fresh starts eventually became integrated into the larger network—either by choosing someone else in the network or by being chosen themselves at a later date. There was only one exception to this, an artist who was not chosen by anyone else and who chose only himself as “best.” Thus the network is fully connected except for this one outlier, who was also excluded from this portion of the analysis.

1 Appendix A provides a discussion of basic network analysis terms and techniques. Readers not familiar with these concepts may wish to read Appendix A before continuing with Chapter 5.

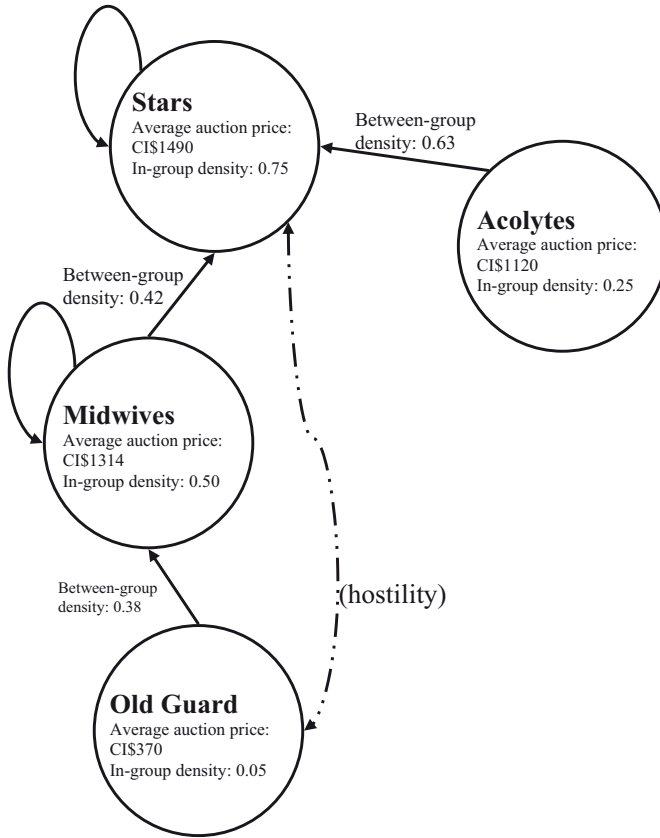


Figure 5.1 Sociogram of the Esteem Blockmodel

The Artists

When the Rarotongan artists were each asked to list the best artists on the island, the pattern of the choices that they made shows the existence of a social network^{2*} of esteem among them. The artists can be grouped together into structurally equivalent* blocks on the basis of similarity in their patterns of ties.* A hierarchy of choices emerges. This reduced model of the esteem network is the sociogram* shown in Figure 5.1. Four groups of structurally equivalent artists emerged in the analysis the Stars, the Acolytes, the Midwives, and the Old Guard.

These groups emerge from the structural analysis of the artists' networks, as is detailed in Appendix A. Both the Stars and the Midwives have significant interactions with each other and function as true social groups. The Stars were

2 Terms marked with an asterisk (*) are defined in the Glossary.

routinely explicitly recognized as a group by other artists during the interviews; the Midwives more implicitly so. The Acolytes are not so much a true group as they are a category of actors united by the similarity of their relationships of esteem to the Stars. Likewise, the Old Guard is not a true social group, but is a category that is made up of relative isolates who stand in a relation of hostility to the Stars and of esteem to the Midwives. It is impossible on an island the size of Rarotonga, however, for any of the individual artists to completely avoid the others and all the members of the groups interact at least in some degree with most other members of the art world. The names attached to the groups are my device to help keep the categories distinct; they are not used by the artists themselves.

The Stars

The first group, the Stars, is a solid clique. That is, the members of the Stars repeatedly chose each other as the best artists on the island. The in-group density* of this clique (based on the frequency with which they listed each other as “best”) was 0.75. The grouping together of these artists is initially based strictly on their structural position within the esteem network, but looking at the individual characteristics of the group members shows that they have many similarities besides just structural position in the art world network. All of the Stars were born in New Zealand, all but one grew up there, and all were educated there, three of them formally in the arts at a post-secondary level. None of them is particularly conversant in the Cook Islands Maori language, although all are of Maori ancestry. The degree to which they are socially similar to each other may be part of the reason for the success of the Stars. As Farrell notes (2001, 126): “The most important factor impeding the development of [a group of writers] was the diversity of the group’s composition. Unlike the more successful circles, the group had to bridge wide differences in cultural background, age and stage of career.” Remember from Chapter 1 that McLeod et al. (1996) in studying the effects of ethnic diversity on creativity in small groups found that while ethnically heterogeneous groups are more creative, ethnically homogeneous groups are more successful. While each of the other groups of artists on Rarotonga has at least some of these types of differences to overcome, the personal characteristics of the Stars are much more uniform. Culturally, their backgrounds were very similar. Demographically, too, they share many important similarities. All but one are men, all but one are within a few years of each other in age, all had fairly young children. All are at similar stages in their careers. All are members of NVAA/CINVAS.³ All had recently gone through rather tumultuous periods in their personal family lives. Perhaps most importantly, all had been strongly influenced by European artists as models not so much for how their own art should look (although those influences were apparent and even sometimes acknowledged), but

3 Many (but not all) of the Stars had signed the Merkens letter. Many (but not all) of the letter signers were Stars.

for conceptions of how an artist's career should look. These were the artists who brought to the island concerns about attention from professional art critics in the foreign media, about international travel and exhibitions, about university degrees in fine arts, about museum acquisitions, about fellowships and grant money. In short, these are the artists who brought "professionalism" in the European model to the Rarotongan art world. Although the content of their artworks always made extensive use of traditional imagery, the crafting of their careers was always along modern European lines. One artist said about the arrival to the island of one of the Stars, "[The Star] was organized and energetic and did it all very thoroughly, not just in the haphazard way of people before —just having an idea and starting something and then nothing ever coming from it."

During the art auction discussed in Chapter 3, the average price bid for artworks by the Stars was CI\$1,490—the highest average for any group. The Stars also received the most esteem ties of any group—half of all choices made by the artists in the study were to the Stars (despite the fact that the number of Stars tied for the smallest size of any group). Their support was also widespread—they are the only group that received at least one choice from each of the other three groups (although from the Old Guard it was *only* one). The Stars did not, however, reciprocate. Only one of the Stars sent any ties to anyone outside of their own group.

Despite the high level of acclaim directed towards the Stars (or, perhaps, because of it), the Stars were also the group whose members were most often attacked by other artists during the course of the interviews, especially by members of the Old Guard, although by members of other groups as well. One artist refers to the Stars as "The Moko* Brigade" (in reference to the ubiquitous island lizard)—a disparaging term that she uses to point out what she sees as a self-serving and rather cynical appropriation of Cook Islands stereotypical imagery used in an attempt by the New Zealand born and educated artists who comprise the majority of the Stars to brand themselves as "real" Cook Islanders. Implicit in this label is a criticism of the Stars for pandering (successfully) to tourists seeking to buy stereotypical "native" art. Another artist is more blunt and refers to the Stars simply as "those assholes." (Unlike all of the other structurally equivalent blocks that emerged from the network analysis, the members of the Stars were frequently informally acknowledged by others as being a group.)

Despite the largely figurative nature of the Star's artwork, many members of the rest of the art world often refer to it collectively as "abstract," a term they see as connoting a lack of skill or even skullduggery, as the tailors who made the emperor's new clothes. Said one artist, "It's abstract—nothing—anyone can do it." More than one of the other artists referred to one particular Star's work as "wallpaper." Tellingly, one artist linked disparaging remarks about the skill level of the Stars with their higher level of formal education: "All of these pieces of paper [diplomas] do not mean that you can make art." A comment in the weekly gossip column "Chooks Corner with the Red Rooster" (Rooster 2002, 29) underscored this line of thinking:

Interesting self-promoting article about local artists appeared in the pro-government paper the other day. Referring to a group [of the Stars] as being top Cook Islands artists chooks ask says who [sic]? How many of them can speak Cook Islands Maori? Going to art school sadly doesn't make anyone top of anything. ... Red says there's only one local artist that is head and shoulders above the wanna be's [sic] and that's [a member of the Midwives]. You won't see a university degree hanging on [this artist's] workshop wall.

It is the combination of their use of traditional imagery (and the vehemence with which they assert their Maori ancestry) coupled with the European-ness of the Stars' ways of conducting their careers as artists that draws forth this response. One advocate of the Stars' adoption of "foreign" methods and manners puts down this type of negative response to the Stars as a result of cultural ignorance of the art of the outside world by others in the Rarotongan art world. He says:

Art in the Cook Islands has always been about performance. Dancing, yes, you're encouraged to dance—that's lovely. Everyone does it for their school and for the dance troops. And singing—you're supposed to sing in these lovely voices in the churches. *Maybe* carving is OK ... But painting? 'What's that? Forget it. Why don't you go and do something productive?' It's never been here and no one knows what it is.

In return, the Stars were quite critical in their comments about the art produced by the rest of the artists on the island, especially the members of the Old Guard. One Star, who first came to the Cooks from New Zealand as an adult, said:

When I came here the art scene was terrible. I thought, 'Ohhhhhh ... is this what we are still doing?' And all these hobby painters were doing pretty floral pictures and they said, 'That's what the tourists want.' And I thought, 'Do they? How do we know?' They were doing it that way because they've always done it that way. And I thought, 'Why?'

A member of the Old Guard responded to the designation "hobby painter" by proudly affirming the label as a marker not of low status, but of high status. "Everything I do is a hobby—I only do it if I want to." This is a good example of the use of "disinterestedness" in the sense that Bourdieu (1985) meant. The artist gains status by claiming to eschew the crass self-interestedness that he posits as motivating others. This disinterestedness is meant to provide a very sharp contrast to the markedly un-Maori *modus operandi* of the Stars.

The Stars sit uneasily at the top of the hierarchy; they work hard to keep themselves there. One artist attributes the Andi Merkens letter to this explicitly structural motive: "[One of the Stars] was the darling of the art world and saw herself getting knocked off the top. They got a bunch of people and made them all feel that their *positions* were threatened [emphasis added]." The Old Guard, by

contrast, without a supportive group structure to provide a basis for coordinated action, take out their frustrations only in largely ineffectual words. The hostility that the others in the art world verbalize towards the Stars lacks punch because it is not backed up by a cohesive support structure.

Far from being merely petty bickering and backbiting, Farrell points out the positive effects—even necessity—of this type of group-to-group criticism; it is an important factor contributing to the beginning stages of a collective artistic movement. He argues that creativity is a socially deviant act, having an inherent element of norm violation. Social sanctions against deviance operate in the art world as well as in the larger society (although what is considered to be deviant will, of course, vary from group to group.) Boundary marking, with its creation of a “safe” community within which deviants feel comfortable continuing and even expanding their deviance, is critical for the development of a shared vision. “We” are not “Them.” And once a “We” emerges, the social support provided by the group can encourage further artistic development and exploration. But, the members of an artistic movement begin to find common ground first through shared criticisms of others.

Early in their relationship, before members develop the trust to explore their deepest interests, and before they sharpen the boundaries between themselves and non-members, they often discover a common antipathy toward authorities in their field. In this stage, they find it easier to talk about what they dislike rather than what they like. They may be vague about the kind of work they value, but they are very clear about the kind of work they reject. Indeed, there may be a ‘slash and burn’ quality to their interactions as they attack with relish the conventional work in their field (Farrell 2001, 21).

This is the stage where the Rarotongan artists now find themselves. The Stars, especially, are coalescing as a defined group, helped considerably by the antagonism directed towards them by the Old Guard.

While Farrell’s historical studies focus on innovative groups emerging from the edges of art worlds dominated by an entrenched and legitimated older aesthetic, it is interesting that in the case of Rarotonga, both the Old Guard and the Stars could be placed in either of these roles—in one sense both are authorities and in another both are outsiders. While the Old Guard, who will be discussed in more detail below, have the weight of Maori tradition and long-standing local ideas about artistic “quality” on their side, their artwork, as the Rarotongan art market becomes increasingly outward looking and globalized, might easily fall into the category of “hobby” or “craft” and must compete even to be recognized as “Art.” It is the Stars’ methods of operating and conceptions of how a “real” artist’s career looks that is gaining ascendancy and is, by its very success, endangering the status that the members of the Old Guard had formerly enjoyed. The Stars have imported a Europeanized definition of “artist” into Rarotonga—one that devalues the work that the Old Guard members do as well as the way in which they go about doing it.

The Stars, on the other hand, work in fully accepted (to the outside world) forms and conventions of serious fine Art, but are not fully accepted on Rarotonga as either true Cook Islanders or as artists with understandable and unequivocally recognized (by the local people) skills. One gallery owner relates: “I hear them [local Cook Islanders] come in here with their kids and say, ‘You could do that—go on.’ And I think, ‘Well, then, I wish you *would* have a go.’” In a climate where “authenticity” and indigeneity are the foundations of cultural prestige, the Stars have enormous difficulty gaining acceptance from precisely that segment of the population that could grant them legitimacy. The Stars and the Old Guard are engaged in a rather heated ideological battle, the stakes of which are the definitions of “quality” art work and the way in which the art market on Rarotonga was to be conducted. The victor in this battle would gain all of the status and legitimacy that the vanquished would lose.

While the Stars rebel against the traditional ways of making art in the Cook Islands, the Old Guard find themselves marginalized by the intrusion of the foreign ideas about art into their world and rebel against the increasing ascendancy of those ideas. Each group sees itself as being denied its proper place in the hierarchy owing to the unfair influence of the other. As Farrell points out (2001, 89):

One of their worst fears during the rebellion stage is that they may be hypocrites; beneath their pretensions they may be no different than those who adhere to conventional thinking. Even worse, they fear that they may be as undisciplined and inept as their most hostile critics claim them to be. To buttress their fragile self-esteem, it is common for members to highlight their own virtues by contrasting them to the vices of a scapegoat ... The scapegoat is often a member of the extended network of the group, rarely one of its core participants.

On an island of only 9,000 inhabitants, the groups of artists are never very far from each other. The scapegoated member of the extended network can also simultaneously be a core member of another group. Or an entire group can function as the scapegoat for the rebelling group, as the Stars and the Old Guard seem to do for each other. Each group criticized the members of the other group as inept—the members of each group had reason to worry that the same criticism could be true of themselves. Specifically regarding the development of the various historical examples of collaborative creative circles that he studied, Farrell (2001, 291) also finds this balance between harmony and dissonance:

My findings suggest that homogeneous circles are more likely to be successful. People from similar backgrounds are more likely to speak the same language, feel at home together, and build the degree of trust characteristic of collaborative pairs. However, I have also found that some degree of diversity within the circle, exemplified by the circle boundary markers, contributes to creativity and to the clarification of the circle’s new vision.

Despite the amount of verbal antipathy expressed by some other artists towards the Stars, it is important to re-emphasize that they sat at the top of the hierarchy of choices made by all the artists in the study. Their worldview (at least as it relates to defining “art”—or even defining “Cook Islands Art”) was in the process of slowly gaining legitimacy and coming to hegemonically dominate the Rarotongan art market. Even those other artists who disparage the Stars’ attitudes and demeanor list them as “best.”⁴ Two of the three most esteemed artists—those who were chosen as “best” most frequently by others, were in the group of Stars. The only member of the Stars to grow up in the Cooks was, in fact, the most popular choice of any artist in the study. He is also the only member of the Stars to have no formal art education at the post-secondary level. Both of these factors undoubtedly contribute to his wide-ranging base of popularity. Indeed, one of the other artists sees this Star, who combines a local appeal with the working methods of the Europeanized Stars, as being key to the explosion of artistic creativity the island is experiencing: “He’s important because he *consistently* produces art. The people here see that and it’s all copycat here—‘Well, if he is doing it, then I will, too.’ They start to consistently produce art.”

It is not surprising that this Star has the highest Betweenness Centrality* score of any artist in the study—60.33,⁵ almost twice as high as the second highest (a member of the Midwives with a Betweenness Centrality score of 34.17.) This means that unlike the other Stars, who have relatively low Betweenness Centrality scores (averaging 4.22, indicating that they are isolated in their own Star-filled clique), this artist has ties that bridge the cliques of the Rarotongan art world. Those bridge ties,* if the ideas developed from previous studies of social networks hold true for this case, should be of enormous career advantage to this artist. And in fact, as a possible confirmation of this, just after the end of the study period, he was awarded the most prestigious and lucrative local arts grant available to Cook Islands artists.

A high Betweenness Centrality score is an indicator of the artist bridging small social worlds, having ties to numerous other cliques. This artist drew artistic sustenance from not only the Europeanized working methods and professionalization of the Stars, but also from the innovative freedom of the Acolytes and the collegial support system of the Midwives, both in receiving esteem ties (and the favorable actions tied to esteem) from those groups and in sending esteem ties (along with ideological openness) to the Acolytes. What he lacked, and this is true for the most part for all of the Stars, was any sort of connection to the long-standing populist art traditions exemplified by the Old Guard. Where this Star differed most strongly from others in his group was that he alone chose outsiders to esteem—the up-and-coming Acolytes. These choices show perspicacity—the tiny art world of

4 Said one artist of one of the Stars, “He certainly has the talent, but ... his ego is scary.”

5 Scores are not whole numbers because there is often more than one geodesic between any two pairs of nodes.

Table 5.1 Densities Within and Between Blocks, Esteem Matrix

	Stars	Midwives	Acolytes	Old Guard
Stars	0.75	0.00	0.13	0.00
Midwives	0.42	0.50	0.00	0.10
Acolytes	0.63	0.00	0.25	0.04
Old Guard	0.07	0.38	0.14	0.05

Rarotonga cannot flourish in the global art market without an influx of new ideas and innovations. As one recently arrived artist noted, “They’re just like spiders, waiting for someone new to fall into the web.”

The Acolytes

The Acolytes can only loosely be called a group as they did not often choose each other in their lists of bests (in-group density* is only 0.25) but instead are brought together by a strongly shared common pattern of choosing, but not necessarily being chosen by, the Stars. (See Table 5.1 for densities within and between groups. See the discussion of Density in Appendix A to help interpret the information in this table.)

In terms of ethnicity, gender, and age, the Acolytes are a mixed bag. Half are men and half women, their age range is larger than any other group (from early 20s to late 50s), their origins span the globe, and the extent of their time in the Cooks ranges from a whole life to just a few months. They can draw on none of the demographic solidarity that the Stars share. Their most coherent characteristic as a group is their recent move into fine art as a career choice. All but one⁶ of them are less than three years into fine art as a serious occupation and all are at the moment bursting on the Rarotongan art scene with the glow of newness and innovation. All of the members of the Acolytes have brought fresh ideas with them into the art world and have been accepted as at least promising. As McLeod et al. (1996, 250) write:

One of the key arguments underlying the effects of group member heterogeneity is that the variety of perspectives and experiences represented on heterogeneous teams contributes to the production of high-quality ideas. Moreover, the variety of perspectives can stimulate further idea production by group members. Kanter (1968) refers to this notion as ‘kaleidoscope thinking’—twisting reality into new patterns and rearranging the pieces to create a new reality (p. 11). Having contact with people from a variety of perspectives is one condition necessary for kaleidoscope thinking.

6 That one, however, had arrived on the island only a few months before.

The average auction price of the Acolytes (CI\$1,005) is somewhat lower than that of the Stars and of the Midwives (discussed below)—but still quite respectable—yet they were not often or consistently chosen by their peers as “best” (receiving only nine of the 53 total choices made by the artists in the study). What groups them together is their cohesiveness in choosing the Stars, to whom they sent most of their ties. Either through calculation or more naïve impulses, these are a group who are positioning themselves to reach the top of the Rarotongan art world. Two of the members of the Acolytes explicitly expressed to me that they are aware of the importance of social networks in facilitating their rise in the arts and are actively pursuing those connections that will help them to the top. They are the only two of all of the artists who participated in the interviews who explicitly (or even implicitly) told me this. Both asked me for copies of my previous work on social networks and success in the art world. These two artists also had the third and fourth highest Betweenness Centrality scores (30.50 and 22.67—although two other members of the Acolytes had Betweenness Centrality scores of zero.) At the end of my stay on the island, one of the Acolytes gave a painting to me saying, “I know that you know important collectors in the US and I figure if I give this to you and they see it on your wall, it might help me out.”

This attitude is represented by a telling caption to a photograph in the *Cook Islands News* that accompanied a story announcing the opening of registration for an art workshop. The caption read in part: “There is no arguing with the popularity of [the Acolyte’s] style, vivid traditional motifery in striking bold colours ... This piece sported a sold sticker on the first night of [a recent] exhibition, and at the asking price too. [The gallery] is still busy proving its point: Art pays!”

The Acolytes esteem the Stars but are positioned to supplant them in the art world hierarchy. Part of the reason for this is that the Acolytes are artistic innovators, especially technically. Only one of the Acolytes in engaged in straight-forward paint-on-canvas painting, while all of the others engage in mixed-media or other seldom seen (on Rarotonga) techniques. Few artists in the other groups were stepping outside the boundaries of established media in this way at the time of the study (although even as I was preparing to leave the island, the techniques of the Acolytes were starting to be adopted by artists in other groups.)⁷ In addition, the imagery used by the Acolytes is more daring than that found in most other groups. While invariably sticking with Polynesian themes, a harder edge is often present. As one of the Acolytes said, “I do try to make people uncomfortable with my work.” This is in contrast, for example, to one of the Stars who said, “I paint whatever I want. I mean, I don’t do things that offend people, but I do whatever I want.”

There are interesting structural reasons why the Acolytes could be expected to be innovators. “As Chubin (1976) found in his study of innovations in science,

7 During the time of the study, for example, one of the Acolytes brought an interesting multi-media technique to the island from the outside and taught it to two other artists and then watched as it spread like a craze through the arts community.

people in marginal positions in a discipline are more likely to be a source of new ideas than are people at the center.” (Farrell, 2001, 268)

As a group, the Acolytes are structurally positioned to innovate. The Stars and the Midwives—both strong cliques with entrenched positions of dominance—have too much to lose. The members of the Old Guard are burdened with sustaining traditions and are finding themselves increasingly isolated. But the Acolytes are just marginal enough to the Cook Islands art world to have freedom, yet connected enough to be able to partake of the information and ideas that exist in many separate cliques.

The Acolytes are oriented towards the top of the artistic hierarchy. The density of choices from the Acolytes to the Stars is 0.63 (almost as dense as the Stars choices of each other) while the density of choices from the Stars to the Acolytes is only 0.13. (This is rather meager, but note that the Acolytes are the only other group towards whom the Stars directed any choices at all.) Yet, despite their orientation towards the Stars and towards economic success in the art world in general, the Acolytes are still grounded in Maori traditions. One member of the Acolytes was the only artist who mentioned native craftspeople as being among the “best artists on the island.” Another dispassionately discussed a history of childhood beatings from his father as it tied in to Maori culture: “He was notorious. But now I understand that he was trying to teach us the old ways. That’s just how it was. He wanted us to learn.” Compare this with the artist mentioned in the previous chapter who discussed his parents’ unwillingness to pass on the Maori language to their children.

Although oriented towards the Stars, the Acolytes are not without criticisms of them. One Acolyte said, damningly, of a group of the Stars: “They paint like Europeans.” As Becker cogently notes (1982, 204), though: “To produce unique works of art that will be interesting to audiences, artists must unlearn a little of the conventionally right way of doing things they have learned.” The Acolytes have unlearned (or, perhaps more accurately, never learned in the first place) the rules of painting “like Europeans.” At the same time, they are disconnected enough from the indigenous culture to have unlearned—or to be able to appreciate from a safe distance—the rules of indigenous art production. No doubt the timing of the Acolytes’ entry into the art world is also fortuitous for them—they entered the fray after the identity-battle lines had been drawn and are therefore able to view the field with a more dispassionate eye.

The Acolytes were chosen by the Old Guard at a density of 0.14—not very high, but still twice the rate at which the Old Guard chose the Stars. This seems odd given the technically experimental nature of the Acolyte’s work. It seems, however, that the Acolytes are for the time being socially non-threatening enough to be at least disregarded, perhaps even esteemed for their role as challengers to the Stars or for their appreciation, at least, of indigenous traditions. The Acolytes, in this way, may actually be the artists that are most true to the idea of Cook Islands culture, for, as Linnekin (1990, 161) and others have noted, indigenous culture was never a static commodity:

... [C]ulture is not like a rock, which ostensibly can pass through many hands and remain unchanged, but is rather like a story that is tailored and embellished in the process of transmission. ... False cultures—static and passively transmitted—are produced by tourist industries, by nationalists, and by scholars, both Western and indigenous. The process of cultural transmission described here is dynamic, creative—and real.

Although the Acolytes are drawn together structurally by their group esteem of the Stars, two members did send ties to the Midwives. Interestingly, both chose the same person, the most traditional member of the Midwives group—arguably the most traditional artist on the island. This is perhaps an acknowledgement that, as a group, the Midwives play a pivotal role in the successful emergence of the Rarotongan art world.

The Midwives

Farrell's (2001) analysis is of individuals playing roles in creative groups; on Rarotonga, entire groups of artists play these roles, including a group of what Farrell calls "midwives" (2001, 91–2):

As members attempt to build consensus on their own emerging values, and as they use these values to evaluate one another's work, the conflicts between them become more intense. As the negative feelings and conflicts mount, the role of peacemaker becomes more salient ... [T]he peacemaker tries to mediate conflicts, either openly or behind the scenes. ... in his own way, a kind of midwife ... (Farrell 2001, 91–2)

The midwives are an especially interesting group. They also are a strong clique who tended to choose each other as "best." Their in-group density is 0.50. In addition, they also choose members of the Stars at a density of 0.31 and were in turn chosen by members of the Old Guard at a density of 0.35. Their average auction price was CI\$1,314—almost as high as the Stars. Ethnically, the Midwives were a mixture of European and Maori and combinations in between, but they all had very long and deep ties to the Cooks, averaging as long a time in the islands as even the Old Guard. Perhaps the most interestingly, the Midwives are all middle-aged (within a few years of each other) and all but one are women. Their work had no stylistic similarities, but their working methods were characterized by a very high degree of artistic generosity and collaborative spirit.

All of the Midwives have played important nurturing roles towards other artists, including lending money, supplying materials, giving art lessons, putting together exhibitions, providing free art work for public spaces and providing studio space to other artists. These efforts were often quietly done and little lauded. Their importance, though, should not be underestimated or misunderstood. While the Midwives provided support for many different artists in many different ways, they

also, perhaps without even fully realizing it, continuously activated unbalanced triads,* bringing antagonistic people from hostile cliques together both formally and informally. That is, by invoking a spirit of collaboration and community-mindedness within the art world, the Midwives (probably unconsciously) frequently bring together members of hostile camps (the Stars and the Old Guard) in collaborative artistic projects and meetings. For example, it was one of the Midwives who, in the wake of the Andi Merkens letter, took over the presidency of CINVAS in order to try to impose some peace among all the discontented factions. Although not as highly esteemed as the Stars, the Midwives play a critical role in providing the social glue that keeps the cliques from disintegrating into mere unconsciousness of each other. Because of the Midwives' actions, artists hostile to each other are continuously brought together. Negative ties of animosity don't have a chance to gently fade away; unbalanced triads among the Stars, the Old Guard, and the Midwives (with the Midwives acting as a pivot between the hostile groups) are kept alive, but on a slow simmer rather than a heated boil. This means that discord can function to provide a spur to creativity without ripping the Rarotongan art world apart. In the spirit of generosity and collaboration, the Midwives foster critique and dissent.

Although the Midwives lent their support widely, they sent their esteem very narrowly; all of their esteem ties went either to the Stars or to each other. But they *received* ties from every group except the Stars. In fact, they received 15 of the 51 esteem ties sent, second only to the Stars in the number received by the group. They were also the only group to which the Old Guard gave any consistent support. This makes sense given the Midwives fervent espousal of traditional Maori attitudes of generosity and community spirit. Oddly, the only member of the Midwives who did not receive any ties from the Old Guard is the most traditional of all the Midwives—the one who most demographically and stylistically matches the Old Guard. This, however, fits with the pattern of internal schism that characterizes the Old Guard, as will be seen below.

The Midwives also had high Betweenness Centrality scores, indicating that their appeal crosses group boundaries. The second, fifth and sixth highest Betweenness scores (34.17, 18.00 and 9.33) are all Midwives. The second highest Degree Centrality* score also belongs to a Midwife, measuring the sheer popularity of this artist among all the others. (See Appendix A for further discussion of the different types of centrality.) Those with high Degree Centrality are most likely to successfully disseminate ideas within a clique, even if they are unlikely to originate innovative ideas themselves.

This does not, however, put the Midwives in a high status position among their fellow artists. Their very proficiency (in contrast to the dominance of the Stars and the innovative glow of the Acolytes) may bring in high auction prices, but is often either denigrated or ignored by many of their fellow artists. At an opening for a group show, one of the Midwives overheard her work being discussed: "I heard the word 'skill' used like a knife." "Skill" has none of the cachet of raw exuberance, but it nevertheless provides a backbone for the art world. Buyers, especially the

tourists who are not interested in political in-fighting, find the Rarotongan art market to be a legitimate venue in large part because of the “skill” displayed by the Midwives. Locals, too, support the art market as patrons of the Midwives. For example, CI\$6,570 of the money raised at the auction for the Creative Centre (an event from which tourists were mostly excluded) came from paintings made by the Midwives, second only to the CI\$6,950 total paid for work by the Stars. Yet, the Midwives are well aware of the slights that they receive, especially from the Stars. Said one, “[A Star] comes in here [her studio] with his nose in the air.”

Moreover, the Midwives as a group also express very little patience with the ethnic identity battles that wrack the art world on Rarotonga. One says wearily, “I’ve heard it all so many times before.” Another offhandedly dismissed an artist with, “He’s another one of the political ones.” It is not that the Midwives are not engaged in the discussions surrounding issues of ethnicity and legitimacy—far from it. Rather, they are balanced—often very precariously—in the tricky position of anchoring the unbalanced triads, linking together the divergent ideologies that provide the mutual critique so necessary if creativity is to reach higher levels. The Midwives are as likely as any to be caught in the cultural cross-fire.

In their art, the Midwives are certainly concerned with traditions and with Cook Islands culture. Said one: “I try to capture what life is like here now, because it won’t be like this forever. Someday all of this will be gone. It has changed *so much* since I was a child.” But the Midwives’ perspective is different from the concerns expressed by, for example, the authors of the Merkens letter. One told me, “I am proud of who I am. I am proud of being Maori. I am proud of my culture and my heritage. But I respect *anybody* who puts their soul in their work.”

Although the Midwives have been in the Cooks on average as long as any of the groups and although they are explicitly concerned with traditional culture, they are not the Old Guard, who are characterized as much by their conceptions about how the art world should run as they are by the art that they themselves produce.

The Old Guard

This is the final group that emerged from the blockmodelling (which is described in further detail in Appendix A.) With one exception, the members of the Old Guard are all self-taught in the arts, often over the opposition of family members who, in following traditional Cook Islands thinking, found art to be an unacceptable occupation for their offspring. Several of the artists emphasized their frustration on this point. Said one, “In the schools, they say ‘culture’, but they only mean dance. Why do they want to do that? Why do they want to limit what our people can do? Why do they want to stamp out art?” Many of the Old Guard, therefore, are seriously pursuing art for the first time rather late in life, after first working in another occupation for many years. As a consequence, they have the oldest average age of any group. The Old Guard are about evenly divided between men and women and between Maori and Europeans. Although not all of them are Maori, for the most part they share a long association (measured in decades) with

the Cooks. In many ways, the Old Guard represent the Cook Islands art world up until the time of the arrival of the Stars. Three of the Old Guard, along with one of the Midwives, many years ago participated in the first formal group art exhibit that any of the interviewees remembered occurring on the island.

The Old Guard received almost no ties, not even from each other. They all had Betweenness Centrality scores of zero. Said one member of the Old Guard, in a sweeping dismissal of the entirety of the Rarotongan art world, “I just don’t have anything to do with any of those people. [A family member] sets up exhibitions for me [in another country], so I just ignore all that lot.” As a group, the Old Guard sent one tie to the Stars, three to the Acolytes and the rest to the Midwives, whom they held in the highest esteem. (In fact, the Midwives, despite being an internally cohesive group, nevertheless received more ties from the Old Guard than they did from each other.) Despite sharing a sensibility and a history together, the Old Guard was not a cohesive clique, although they certainly knew of each other’s work. They did not often criticize each other, though, saving most of their venom for the Stars.

The members of the Old Guard are oriented towards local sensibilities, especially the part of the population that has absorbed fewer of the ideas recently imported from New Zealand and instead remains anchored in more traditional Cook Island ways of thinking. When I asked one of the Stars what type of artwork the older generation of her extended family in the Cooks favored, she replied with the name of one of the Old Guard artists.

For the Old Guard, validation as a successful artist is tied to pleasing customers from the local populace. Said one, “People have always liked my drawings. They come to me and tell me what they want and I understand what they are saying and draw it for them.” Another, who was asked by several local women to give them group art lessons, said, “That is my biggest success—that those ladies wanted *me* to be their tutor.” This is validation not from the world of international fine art criticism, but from the members of the local world that makes up the friends, neighbors and family of the artist. Status is gained not from breaking into new, higher levels of the art world hierarchy, but from pleasing the members of one’s own familiar and, therefore, valued stratum. Like the makers of *tivaevae*, these artists strive to be *taunga*,* valuing symbolic capital in their community over economic capital from the outside world.

This type of thinking connects to the very heart of traditional Maori culture. Gell tells us that:

It is known that, for instance, individual tattoo artists among the Maori achieved great personal fame (and charged higher fees accordingly). They did so because their work instantiated, better than their competitors’, what Maori collectively regarded as excellence in the matter of tattooing—not because their tattoos were appreciated as distinctive productions expressive of their artistic individuality. (1998, 158)

The Old Guard work in exactly this type of arena, looking for rewards from exactly this same audience.

Of all the groups, the Old Guard were the most strongly bound by traditional mores. Said one member of the Old Guard on Rarotonga who has family ties to Mangaia, one of the other southern Cook Islands, “People have to be careful of what they carve.” He then told me a story of carving some half-human/half-fish figures from Mangaian legend, which he later had to destroy because they were troubling and disturbing him—the carvings, he felt, needed to go back to Mangaia. “Now I only carve bowls because they represent *my* family. They belong to me, so I can carve them. I don’t carve other people because that belongs to *them*. It is powerful—a powerful force. I tell the people in the shop next door not to put those carvings in there, but they don’t listen to me and now their shop is empty all the time. No people [that is, customers].”

This is a different conception of traditional constraints on art production than the idea of merely losing status that the Stars, for example, report as their reason for not making prints of their paintings. Tied to pre-Christian ideas of the spirit world, some members of the Old Guard often see the art works themselves as animate and even vengeful. One artist told me that another artist used to be “thin like me” until he carved a group of playfully corpulent sculptures of some of the Maori gods. This act of irreverence, he said, caused the other artist to start getting fat.

Not all of the members of the Old Guard subscribe to such traditional spirituality, but all are conservative in other ways, especially in their ideas about what constitutes “legitimate” art, often strongly dismissing the “freedom” that they see as characterizing—negatively—the art produced by the Stars. In a newspaper article about arts education, the reporter notes that one Old Guard artist’s “view is that young art students should not commence with the free expressionism of abstract painting without a good grounding in figure studies, portraits, still lifes and landscapes first.” Ironically, even though the members of the Old Guard constitute less of a cohesive clique than any other group, sending no ties to each other, their artwork itself shares the most stylistic similarity, based on realist depictions of people, flowers, and landscapes.

Despite the fact that several members of the Old Guard run either art galleries or other businesses where they have their artworks displayed for sale, the Old Guard are perceived by other members of the Rarotongan art world as lacking professionalism. Their realist depictions are seen as amateurish. Moreover, they fail to promote their art work along the lines of the Europeanized fine art world. That is, ways in which the Old Guard go about presenting their work are seen as lower than the standards of the rest of the art world. One of the Midwives, for example, noted this feature of the one of the members of the Old Guard, “I helped her hang her show. Nothing was properly framed.”

For their part, the members of the Old Guard have little patience with the political arguments over culture and identity. One dismissed the Stars: “This New Zealand Maori thing really gets on my nerves.” Having worked very hard to

overcome opposition to art as an occupational choice among the local populace and then to achieve success in that milieu, the members of the Old Guard find that they are denied respect from a group which itself is loudly making an issue of being themselves denied respect. The Old Guard are naturally less than sympathetic. They attack the Stars on the basis of talent and technique, perhaps in lieu of embarking on discussions of political issues—complex discussions that the members of the Old Guard may have very little confidence of winning. Instead, interestingly enough, the Old Guard stake their claims for status on living and working in accordance with traditional cultural norms. Their lack of economic success is held up as proof of their authentic Maori-ness. Thomas (1991, 203) saw a very similar process on display in Fiji where “there has been a tendency for indigenous people to emphasize the fact of reciprocity in their own transactions, that is, to emphasize the ways in which these presentations differ most from the ‘money life’ of white foreigners.”

As the art market on Rarotonga is slowly transformed so that it is oriented towards a new—and wealthier—audience, the Old Guard are increasingly finding that their day has passed. Few of them were invited to participate in the Creative Centre auction and those that were averaged only CI\$370 for the works that they donated. One reason to expect the increasing irrelevance of the Old Guard to the Rarotongan art world is the fragmented and isolated nature of their art world ties. Of all the groups, the Old Guard was the least internally cohesive, ignoring each other as they themselves are ignored by the rest of their peers. The members of the Old Guard share artistic sensibilities and values, but while they rather uniformly despise the Stars and esteem the Midwives, they fail to see common cause with each other. At the bottom of the social structure, they have every reason to band together into their own artistic school. Yet, they do not. They are similar in their personal characteristics but entirely idiosyncratic in their actions. They do not seem to help each other out or support each other’s artistic endeavors in any but the most minimal ways. Without coordinated behavior or cohesive group identity, they are rapidly sinking into artistic insignificance even for the group of local customers who originally formed the basis of their public—that public, as the auction prices indicate, is slowly shifting its support to the Midwives, the Acolytes, and even the Stars instead.

The fractured nature of the Old Guard is important to the functioning of the Rarotongan art world, both ideologically and interpersonally. Because the Old Guard can provide a source of traditional inspiration but is not a unified force capable of squashing artistic innovation, artists from each of the other groups can use the Old Guard as sources of both inspiration and scapegoating without worrying about any coherently organized negative responses. Because they are socially weak, in the structural sense, the Old Guard can play the important role of contentious—but ultimately impotent—prods to the development of a uniquely Rarotongan art scene. Their powerlessness (a result of their internal fragmentation) means that they can be ideologically useful to the other groups without being threatening.

The Rarotongan Art Network

The Rarotongan artists are in the process of developing a mature and coherent vision of a distinctive school of art. As Farrell (2001, 282) notes,

Nemeth (1993) found that groups with a vocal internal opposition developed more sophisticated and complex solutions to problems they were given to solve than did less contentious groups. The presence of a questioning minority stimulates thinking in other members, and, confronted with negative feedback, the groups develop more creative and workable solutions to their problems.

Artists need supportive groups in order to risk the social deviance necessary for creativity and innovation. But there is a limit to how much group support is useful before it becomes stifling—both socially and artistically. Contention and cooperation both are necessary for the groups to work in such a way as to make possible the development of a viable and dynamic original art world. The interactions of the network members provide the various pieces that fit together into the larger creative endeavor.

On Rarotonga, the artists are grouped together into four types of roles which interact with each other. Each of these different roles functions as both support and critique for others. On the island, the members of these groups cannot distance themselves from each other and sometimes cannot escape from the necessity of performing the roles that they play. This is overlaid with intense and often inflammatory discussions of ethnicity, intellectual property, and cultural legitimacy.

The Stars are economically very successful and dominate, for the moment, the art world on Rarotonga. They represent one type of artistic legitimacy—legitimacy on the “European” model of fine art. The Stars are the most responsible for giving what had been considered mere “craft” the status of “Art” and provide the clearest example of how to use fine art as a viable and lucrative career in the *economic* marketplace. Their example is key to encouraging a new generation of local artists to see the economic possibilities of pursuing an artistic career. It is the Stars who are leading the way for Rarotonga to join the world of international art markets. And it is the Stars who form the most internally cohesive group. It is the Stars’ social capital and their structural resources as a tightly-knit group, coupled with their ideological hostility, especially towards Old Guard as examples of less skilled and less professionalized artists, that affords them their position at the top of the economic hierarchy.

The Acolytes, sitting on the margins of the Rarotongan art world but still connected to it with bridge ties, bring innovation to the mix. The Acolytes have ties to the traditional Cook Islands culture but, unhampered by excessive social and ideological demands for conformity to any group and oriented towards the Europeanized model of an artist’s career path, the Acolytes have the social resources necessary to be profitably deviant. They have not yet become part of

the internecine warfare between the Stars and the Old Guard and can therefore reap all the benefits of others' hostility. It is their *social* capital—that is, their advantageous position in the web of social relationships—that forms the basis of their possibilities for *future* success. For the moment, the Acolytes are unrealized potential. Social capital can eventually be traded for economic and/or symbolic capital. It will be interesting to see in which direction the Acolytes choose to go—towards the symbolic rewards of traditional Maori high status or the economic rewards of Europeanized high status. Very likely, the political fallout from the ethnicity/identity battles will play a role in determining what types of capital (economic, symbolic, and so on) become most sought after among the Acolytes—as well as among many other segments of Rarotongan society.

The Midwives nurture other artists, but in doing so they also (perhaps inadvertently) keep unbalanced triads activated. This may be the most important role that they play and the one that earns them the least respect among their peers. By keeping the tensions within the art world in play, they facilitate the internal critique that prevents Rarotongan art from stagnating. The Midwives are key for both soothing tensions between factions and bringing together hostile parties in ways that may re-ignite animosities. Their social position at the apex of unbalanced triads is key to the success of the art world, but it also puts them into personally difficult social situations and brings them little regard in the Rarotongan art world. The Midwives act as *taunga*,* but are not often, thus far, recognized as such. This may be because as the basis for high status shifts from *mana** to money, the value of their role is being undercut and, although it is crucial, it is ignored. This does not bode well for the future of Cook Islands art.

The members of the Old Guard also seek a more traditional type of legitimacy—high status rooted in the community. They critique, but do not threaten because they are so disorganized amongst themselves. The members of the Old Guard are losing their position of status and it is being usurped by the Stars (legitimate Art), the Midwives (traditions of generosity and support) and the Acolytes (innovative art and also respect for local artisan/craft production.)

The contentious nature of Rarotongan art world interaction is based on the mutability of the hierarchy of the prestige ladder. The different groups are vying to legitimate certain types of capital and de-legitimate other types. The Stars have high capital as long as *European* standards are used. They have high economic capital and high European cultural capital. Their social capital within the clique is quite high, but between their clique and other groups is quite low. The Old Guard, on the other hand, have high capital as long as *Maori* standards are used. They have high Maori cultural capital and high Maori symbolic capital, but low economic capital and low social capital both within their group and between their group and other groups. This is especially important because their high position on the status hierarchy of both Maori cultural capital and Maori symbolic capital is under attack from the Stars who would like to supplant Maori values with European ones. Without social capital—without a cohesive group-for-itself—the Old Guard cannot fight back. Both the Acolytes and the Midwives have good social capital—

especially between their group and other groups, but the two groups use this capital in different ways. The Acolytes use it to be innovators in pursuit of both economic and symbolic capital—both in the Maori and European modes, but tending for the moment towards the European model. The Midwives, meanwhile, try to use their social capital to acquire Maori cultural capital—as facilitators working within the tradition of generosity—but also in pursuit of economic capital.

The network picture shows a complex system of interactions where different groups work to keep innovation alive and at the same time ground the artwork in a serious Cook Islands Maori idiom. This interlocking of personal and ideological relationships is the creation of real “Cook Islands art.” Becker notes the importance of not only producing artwork, but also *thinking* about artwork (1982, 320): “... the pioneers also begin to construct the rudiments of an art world ... collegial groups in which aesthetic questions can be argued, standards proposed, and work evaluated ...” The small worlds within the larger Rarotongan art world each play an important role vis-à-vis the others in creating an artistic renaissance on the island. In the final chapter, I will explore how these issues and processes touch larger questions about the social organization of creativity.

Chapter 6

Re-evaluating Creativity in a Changing World

Gell (1998) argues that artworks activate a series of relations among the agents and patients surrounding the artwork. Patrons commission works and thereby cause the artist to make them. Models sit for portrait artists and cause the resulting painting to look like themselves. Artists shape the material of the index and cause it to look a certain way, thus causing a certain response in the audience for the work. Emotions of pride, awe, mortification, and so on are evoked by the artwork. Purchasers of artworks perhaps get prestige from their purchases and perhaps give prestige to the artist who produced the work. Critics champion particular stylistic innovations and see their own status rise when major collectors and museums validate those judgments by collecting artworks in that style. The effects of the artwork on social relations ripple out from it in rings of social consequence.

Social consequence is played out in the relationally structured space of what Bourdieu called the “field.” Relative status in the field is based on struggles by all the actors to be legitimated as dominant in that field. As the actors in the field jockey for position, the status of each—the position of each with regard to distance from the dominant pole of the field—is determined by the relative positions of all the others in the field. The critic who champions an art style that is legitimated by major collector and museum purchases moves towards the dominant pole of the field of art criticism, surpassing those who backed the “wrong horse.” But the definition of “wrong” (or “right,” “good,” “bad,” “tasteful,” “high quality,” and so on) is itself a contentious issue. All actors, including the “major” collectors and museums are constantly in a struggle to maintain their position (if they are dominant) or to move up (if they are not.) Legitimation, dominance, autonomy—all can be lost when other actors move up and capture the high status position. More importantly, the high status position itself is a definition up for grabs. Subversive strategies in the field are pursued by actors who wish to gain dominance by legitimating different *types* of goals within the field. Critics could, for example, become labeled “stuffy old bores” by a new set of art world players who denigrate the entombment of artworks in “major” (read: boring and staid) collections and museums and instead argue that the “best” artworks are, say, the ephemeral productions street artists. Subversive strategies look to privilege different rules, different goals, and different types of capital on the playing field. In the struggle for power in the field, the peace of kings is thin indeed.

Artworks themselves, in Gell’s formulation, are parts of “distributed persons.” They are an extended part of artists, patrons, recipients, prototypes, and so on. The

fate of the artwork is bound up with the fates of all of those who are socially related to it, so that artworks, too, are agents and artworks, too, are actors who struggle in the field. To be the owner of a Picasso means something in the struggles in the field. To own a Basquiat means something else. To be tattooed by a traditional taunga or to be gifted with a fine tivaevae means something else again. These objects have positions in the field and those positions change and move relative to one another as they rise and fall in status—as they are legitimated through one set of criteria or another. The status distinction between gifted with a tivaevae and buying a Picasso is a contentious distinction that is decided—and re-decided—socially.

Creativity is an attempt at subversive strategies in the field. Breaking the old rules of the game in an attempt to re-write the rules along different criteria is both a definition of creativity and a definition of subversion in the field. Creativity is embodied in indices—artworks, in this case—which are parts of distributed people. Creativity is a subversive weapon for actors in the field. And the use of art is a strategy for actors in the field of power.

Creativity happens as a result of this social contest. It is a social strategy. What is recognized, what is legitimated, what is valorized or mocked or disdained—all of these judgments are social judgments and they are made by social actors for social reasons. Innovative artists are at first called “mad” by the dominant actors in the artistic field—they must be if the challenge they are putting up to the established social order is to be quashed. Others champion those artists and the battle is on. The battle is on in the Cooks—the stakes are higher than merely some sales to passing tourists. The stakes are about the ordering of the social world of the island. That these issues are so unsettled is one part of the reason for the expansion of artistic creativity on the island. The ways in which the social relations among the artists are structured is another.

The tiny island of Rarotonga is in the midst of an artistic renaissance. In the space of less than a decade, it went from being a cultural backwater (where the predominant artistic expression on the island was cheap carving imported from Indonesia) to a growing arts community (where the number of art galleries per capita and surpasses New York, Paris, and London.) Within Polynesia itself, Rarotonga has become recognized as a hub of creativity.

Visual decoration has been an important part of Maori culture for centuries, but the degree of art production on Rarotonga is something new—the artists there are in a moment of innovative ferment. In looking at the art world on Rarotonga, I have tried to explore three questions: Why did *this* place at *this* time experience such a surge of artistic production? How did this art world come to be built? How are creativity and innovation linked to social structure?

Rarotongan society has been facing some significant changes. Population movement from the outer islands to Rarotonga and from Rarotonga on to New Zealand means that the stability of the social networks that previously formed a solid base for Rarotongan society has been radically disrupted. Moreover, tourist dollars now increasingly available mean that material wealth has become a factor in demarcating status in a way that was never possible before. But the transition

from mana to money as a source of status is not an easy one to make. In the Cooks, this transition is seriously undermined as it runs up against important and well-supported cultural norms—The Polynesia Way, after all, emphasizes generosity, family, community-mindedness, and distribution of resources. This is not fertile ground for the growth of untrammelled capitalism. As the incident of the Merkens letter discussed in Chapter 4 shows, those who violate—or even *seem* to violate—those communal norms can come in for censure from the whole community. This local community can still effectively police individual behaviors on Rarotonga. This is especially true because the island is so small—there can be little anonymity among 9,000 people living in an area of only 67 square kilometers. The norms of the Polynesia Way are shored up by the active religious life on the island that still plays a prominent role in every day activities.¹ Religious mores focus heavily on the traditional values of generosity and sharing. Since foreigners cannot own land in the Cooks and the numbers of foreigners resident on the island are tightly controlled, there is little chance that non-Cook Islanders can have a very significant impact on the society. More influential than the foreigners are the Cook Islanders coming from or returning from New Zealand, where they have been educated. Although these foreign-born Cook Islanders may seem to be the most disruptive cultural influence, in fact, informed by the indigenous rights movements from around the globe, they are instead a strong source of a renaissance of traditional Cook Islands culture. The returning Cook Islanders, especially those connected with the arts, have been a source of reinvigorating respect for traditional cultural ideals, albeit modified for melding with a more pan-Polynesian, or even global, outlook.

Charles Pitt (28 December 2002, 17) writes that the arts community itself is “coming of age.” But what does it mean for a community to come of age? In this case, it seems not only developing an art world in Becker’s sense, where producers, suppliers, distributors, critics, patrons, and so on all function together, but also to develop a status hierarchy based on cultural and symbolic capital rather than on mere economic capital. It means that contemporary Cook Islands artists are beginning to achieve taunga status. Coming of age in this modern world, ironically, means being accorded status based on traditional conceptions of prestige. The art world on Rarotonga has become modernized, but in a newly-refurbished traditional way.

For the buyers and patrons of Cook Islands art, coming of age means enshrining their own cultural capital in a position of high status in a hierarchy that is under attack from the changes percolating through Rarotongan society as a whole. Their success in using cultural capital as a basis for high status can be seen in the response to the destruction of the CICC graveyard, discussed in Chapter 4, where the community rallied behind those intent on cultural preservation over the

1 I mentioned to one local artist, for example, the practice of opening all public occasions, even CINVAS meetings, with a prayer. “Oh, yes,” the artist responded, “You can’t open a box around here without saying a prayer first.”

“beautification” of the church grounds. While this action was in support of most “archeological” reading of the meaning of “culture,” the auction for the Creative Centre, not only in the amount of money raised but also in the popular reactions to the event itself, show how champions of historical culture can become tastemakers of contemporary culture as well. That is, their patronage of contemporary art signaled the high status of the buyers at the auction. The elites on Rarotonga are tied to “culture,” including fine contemporary art. Connecting with charity and community-mindedness, the auction of contemporary fine art valorized those who participated and was the first step in institutionalizing their status.

There is increasingly a demand from local buyers for contemporary art. Local demand for fine artworks as such is something new in the history of the Cook Islands. Although Cook Islanders have been trading art for almost two centuries, until now it has been with outsiders, missionaries and tourists. The growth of demand from the inside harks back to the use of traditional items such as tapa and fine mats as sources of communal prestige. The pull for artistic production from the inside may be the most important ingredient in valorizing fine arts production and in turning contemporary artists into taunga. The elites of the wider society need contemporary fine arts production in order to solidify their own position at the top of the shifting status hierarchy. The high status of the artists is useful to their patrons. Here we see one reason for the rising respect accorded to the local artists. Acclaim for the artists reflects positively on the art patrons. An increasingly large segment of Rarotongan society needs acclaimed artists. Cultural capital is a weapon for making invidious distinctions. This demand for art from local buyers coexists with the steady stream of tourist dollars from the outside. As the money from overseas art buyers continues to undergird the Rarotongan art world, there is support for all types of art. The system does not lack for the economic capital to keep it going, but the unseemly nature of that capital can be kept hidden when it comes to local buyers and to local artists, who can disparage “tourist art” while still living off the money it brings them.

For the producers, the artists themselves, the growth of creativity is tied to social interactions. The networks among the artists explain why so much artistic creativity is happening on the island. The social interactions within and between the different groups of artists are the key.

Within the groups, the artists spur each other on, validating the deviance that is the foundation, even the definition, of creativity. Deviance is easier to pursue when one has the support of like-minded others. Moreover, the groups are very effective at scapegoating those whom the members consider to be backsliders. This critical verve pushes innovation forward; artists have a social stake in differentiating themselves and their artworks from those that they see as illegitimate. Artists must go further than they might otherwise or risk the censure of the group. And, of course, the artists are getting ideas from each other, exploring possibilities and techniques that they see in each others work, sharing revelations and insights. Sometimes the artists are even sharing actual images, as when one painter in the Stars started incorporating photographs taken by a member of another group into

his paintings using a technique that he learned from one of the Acolytes. Within this small art world, the cross fertilization that happens as a result of the sharing between individual producers can have a stimulating effect on innovation and creativity.

As well as the harmony, the disharmony that the artists expressed also played a crucial role in stimulating creativity and innovation. On Rarotonga, there is plenty of critique, critical thinking that keeps an artist from becoming complacent. This is especially true of the animosity between the Old Guard and the Stars. The arrival of the Stars from New Zealand created such an artistic uproar that the possibility of continuing to produce merely pretty genre paintings for a scattering of locals and tourists was no longer socially possible—too much identity was at stake. These debates play out in public—in the media, at openings, and on all the important gossip network that hooks the island community together. The Acolytes, especially, as observers to these discussions, are in a great position to benefit from the critiques. They constantly see others' work and hear the arguments over ideas and meanings that form such an important part of the art world discourse on the island. Flying under the radar of the art world, but attached enough to see what is at stake, the Acolytes have the social freedom to innovate and the social ties to find just enough support to prosper.

The precarious balance between critique and comradery is maintained by the Midwives who continually activate the unbalanced triads between hostile factions, but also work behind the scenes to mediate conflicts. On such a small island, they hold the fractious arts community together so that there is a critical mass of arts producers, so that the rancor does not reach such a fever pitch that groups splinter into isolated individuals and, most importantly, so that the ideological debates continue to happen. The Midwives are not the gadflies of the Rarotongan art world—but they do help bring the gadflies to the horses.

All of this plays out in the context of a culture that strongly values generosity. This may be the most important factor in explaining the Rarotongan art world. The Maori ideal of generosity is vigorously alive, existing even within the more westernized arts production mode. While economic capital is *lost* when outsiders take traditional cultural ideas and intellectual property and then sell it themselves, symbolic capital is *gained* when insiders borrow ideas and incorporate those ideas in their own artistic productions. This is the essence of the taunga. As the Rarotonga art world comes of age through privileging symbolic capital, sharing becomes even more highly esteemed among cultural producers. Intellectual sharing is the marker of the high status taunga. The cross-fertilization of ideas creates the “kaleidoscope” vision that spurs innovation. Mrs Grace Ngaputa was extremely insightful in her comments about making tivaevae (Rongokea 2001, 85): “... I don't mind women copying. I feel proud. I think when you share like that it helps you get new ideas for yourself.” Creativity is collective.

The development of the Rarotonga art world may eventually affect a much larger segment of Rarotongan society. Economic success in the fine arts is becoming tied to taunga status. That traditional status need not stand at odds with

economic success will help preserve cultural norms. The taunga becomes not an antiquated idea, but a viable career option in the changing and westernizing world of the South Pacific. Art need not be made just for tourists anymore; rather than cater to perceived tourist tastes with false images and impressions, as was promoted for Tahiti, local Cook Islanders are beginning to broadly support fine art and high culture made by indigenous people for indigenous people. The support of indigenous culture tied to high levels of symbolic and economic capital is already part of the resurgence of respect for traditional culture that is happening not just in the expatriate enclaves of Maori New Zealand, but right at home in the Cooks themselves. This may be the most important factor of all in preserving traditional Cook Islands culture. The loss of population—especially young, intelligent, highly motivated and creative people—could possibly be stemmed somewhat if young Cook islanders did not have to leave the islands in order to find fulfilling and meaningful work. The Cooks could conceivably see the rise of the creative class. The possibilities available in the art world could give Cook islanders a realistic reason to stay home.

Right now, Rarotonga is awash with artistic activity. The structure of social relations—combining supportive groups with active critique—and the unsettled issues around ethnicity, prestige, and modes of being an artist all combine to make an active ferment of creativity. All of this is embedded in a culture that has traditionally stressed generosity and the sharing of ideas and skills. Rarotonga is crowded with actors, ideas, and artworks. Creativity on the island happens collectively.

Appendix A

Basic Network Concepts

In order to analyze the importance of the social structure of the artists, it will be helpful to introduce some basic network analysis concepts for those who have not studied this field. Much more detailed information about network analysis can be found in Wasserman and Faust (1994), Scott (1991), or Berkowitz (1982). This short background discussion will, however, provide a basis for looking more analytically at the effect of social structure on the actions and attitudes of the members of the Rarotongan art world.

Network analysis techniques allow us to examine the detailed structure of some types of social relationships so as to better understand how those relationships play out in the larger question of collective creativity. In Chapter 5, we look specifically at networks of esteem and at the clique-building that esteem and disesteem generate among the Rarotongan artists, especially as it relates to boundary marking, innovation, and expansion of the Rarotongan art market.

Nodes

A “social network”* is a set of relations between actors. Those actors are called “nodes”* and may be either individuals (such as the artists in this study) or groups (for example, nations trading in the global marketplace.) The nodes chosen for study usually form some coherent population, although they need not necessarily do so, or the coherence might be quite minimal, (for example, “people in the United States” —Travers and Milgram 1969)

Ties

The nodes have relationships with each other. The relationships are called “ties.”* The possible contents of the ties is also quite broad-ranging, from kinship and family ties (as in Bott 1956) to professional associations (as in Coleman, et al. 1966) or shared group memberships (as in Breiger 1974) to even dislike or hostility (as in White, et al. 1976.) The ties themselves have characteristics—some ties are weak while others are strong, for example. An example of a weak tie might be a nodding acquaintance while the corresponding strong tie would be “best friends.” Granovetter (1973) has shown the importance of weak ties for bridging social worlds, while Wellman (1992) has discussed the different social usefulness of ties

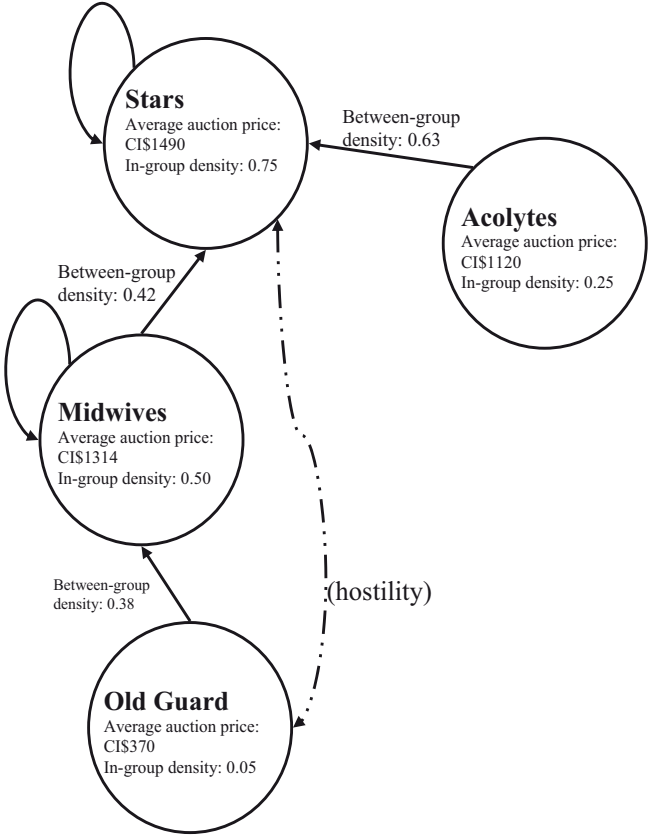


Figure A.1 Esteem Sociogram

of many different types and strengths. (For example, strong ties are important, not surprisingly, for borrowing large sums of money.)

Direction

Another characteristic of ties, which is especially important in this study, is “direction.”* “Direction” refers to the flow of content across the tie. Not all ties have direction. A parent and a child, for example, have a directionless—or symmetric*—“kin” tie. They are each related to the other. They do, however, have an asymmetric* “power” tie. The parent has the power to enforce the child’s bedtime, for example, but the child lacks the power to do the same for the parent. When looking at ties with direction, it is necessary to be very precise in defining

the content of the tie (the child may have the power to make the parent feel guilty, for instance.)

The ties discussed in Chapter 5 are asymmetric “esteem” ties; they have direction. Artists chose to “send esteem” across a tie to another artist by choosing that other artist as one of the “three best artists on the island.” Choices were not necessarily reciprocated—indeed, more often than not, those chosen as “best” by one artist did not in return list that artist in their own list of “best.” This is a common feature of social life; it strongly resembles the social patterns found by Coleman, et al. (1981) in their classic study of American adolescents. This type of asymmetry is the basic building block of hierarchy. To chose to esteem another and not to be chosen back by that other puts the chooser in a subservient position to the one chosen. (Think of unrequited love.)

Grouping together actors with similar patterns of choices aggregates into hierarchically ordered social strata—as Figure A.1 (which is discussed in much more detail in Chapter 5) shows happening on Rarotonga. Those at the bottom are clustered together because they chose, but were not chosen by, those in the middle level of the hierarchy. It is this pattern—choosing but not being chosen—that defines them as the bottom. One group of those in the middle are alike in that they were chosen by those on the bottom but chose instead to esteem those on the top—and were not themselves chosen as objects of esteem by those on top. Those on the top were chosen by the middle groups, but themselves chose only each other as objects of esteem. The choices need not, of course, have ordered themselves so hierarchically. It is easy to imagine circular systems where the Group A chooses Group B, Group B chooses Group C and Group C chooses Group A. Equally possible would be a chaotic system where although there is asymmetry in the choices, those chosen by one set of people would fail to act in concert in choosing a similar set of people as their own choices. It is interesting in real social life, though, how often hierarchy emerges.

Sociograms and Matrices

Figure A.1 is an example of a “sociogram.”* A “sociogram” is a drawing of the network using circles to represent the nodes (in this case, groups of Rarotongan artists) and lines to represent the ties (in this case, esteem.) Another example of a sociogram is given in Figure A.2. The direction of the ties is represented by arrows on the lines (no arrow would mean a directionless, or symmetric, tie.) The absence of any line means the absence of any tie.

Although this is a nice way to think visually about network structure, once the networks become very complex or have very many members, sociograms become unwieldy and difficult to use for the purposes of analysis. Instead, network analysts use a “matrix”* of the network members. This is a translation of the information in the sociogram into a tabular form that is easier to manipulate. The example matrix made from the sociogram of the Impressionists is given in Table A.1.

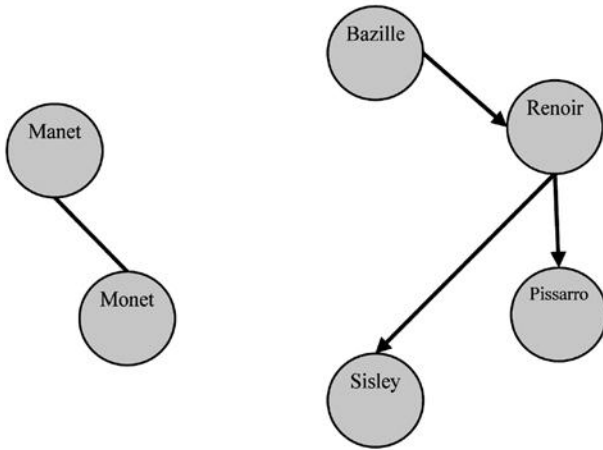


Figure A.2 Example Sociogram

The horizontal rows in this example are the “Choosers” and the vertical columns are the “Chosen.” A “1” at the intersection of a row and a column means that the artist on that row has chosen the artist on that column as “best,” while a “0” means that they have not. Note that in this highly fictional example, Bazille has chosen Renoir as “best,” but Renoir has not chosen Bazille as best, favoring Pissarro and Sisley instead. Monet and Manet have chosen each other.

I converted the responses to the question about who is “best” from the artists on Rarotonga into an “esteem matrix” of just this type. This means that the artists were listed as the rows and columns of a square matrix. The cell value for every intersection of a row and column in the matrix was a “1” if the artist on that row had listed the artist on that column as “best” and a “0” otherwise. These are directional ties, which means that although the Row/Column A Artist might choose the Row/Column D Artist as “best,” Artist D might not return the compliment. The individual artists were placed in groups (as will be discussed in detail below) to produce the sociogram in Figure A.1. Table A.2 is the matrix translation of that sociogram.

Density

While direction is a characteristic of individual ties, “density”* is a characteristic of groups, either the network as a whole or groups within it. “Density” is the number of actual ties made by the members of a group divided by the number of ties which could have been made. The density for the matrix of artists in Table A.1 of French Impressionists is 5/30 or 0.17 (assuming that the artists were not

Table A.1 Example Matrix

		Chosen					
		Bazille	Renoir	Pissarro	Sisley	Monet	Manet
Choosers	Bazille	0	1	0	0	0	0
	Renoir	0	0	1	1	0	0
	Pissarro	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Sisley	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Monet	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Manet	0	0	0	0	1	0

Table A.2 Matrix Translation of Figure A.1

	Stars	Midwives	Acolytes	Old Guard
Stars	1	0	0	0
Midwives	1	1	0	0
Acolytes	1	0	0	0
Old Guard	0	1	0	0

allowed to choose themselves.) This means that of all the possible ties that *could* be made in this network, 17 percent (one sixth) of them have *actually* been made.

Looking at the densities of different sections of a network helps to unravel the working of network structure. A group in a network that has very high in-group density functions differently than does a group that has very low in-group density. One is a bona-fide clique (like the Stars and the Midwives in Figure A.1, with in-group densities of 0.75 and 0.50, respectively), whereas the other is merely a collection of individuals who share a position, but nothing else (like the Acolytes and, especially, the Old Guard in Figure A.1, with in-group densities of 0.25 and 0.05). (An example of the importance of this distinction might be Marx's view of the difference between a class-for-itself as opposed to merely a class-in-itself.) Density is important not only within groups in a network, but also between groups in a network. If the density of choices from Group A to Group B is very high (that is, many members of Group A are choosing members of Group B—like the Acolytes choosing the Stars [density of 0.63]), that is an important feature of the network structure—especially if it is contrasted with a very low density of ties (that is, few choices) from Group B to Group A (like few Stars choosing Acolytes [density of 0.13]).¹

1 In real social worlds, there are few networks that are completely “clean”—few situations in which absolutely no one from B chooses A, or in which absolutely everyone

Centrality

While density is a characteristic of groups of actors (that is, networks or parts of networks), “centrality”^{*} is a characteristic of actors in groups. There are different types of centrality. The two types of centrality with which I am concerned in this study are “degree centrality”^{*} and “betweenness centrality.”^{*} Degree centrality is simply a measure of the number of ties that a given node has. In this analysis, actors have very high centrality when they are chosen by many others. Actors with high Degree Centrality scores are highly esteemed by others in the network. Figure A.3 shows an example sociogram. Note that Actor A has very high Degree Centrality while Actor B has low Degree Centrality. That is, Actor A has ties to many network members while Actor B has only a few ties. However, the pattern of these ties is also important and interesting. While Degree Centrality measures the amount of contact that an actor has with the network, Betweenness Centrality is concerned with the patterns that those ties form.

In sociological studies ranging from the ways in which people find jobs (Granovetter 1974), engage in successful political action (Hannerz 1980), successfully navigate the corporate world (Burt 1992) or the art world (Giuffre 1999), or secure illegal abortions (Howell 1969), sociologists have demonstrated the importance of “bridge ties.”^{*} Bridge ties are those that make bridges between social cliques, the tightly-knit groups of positively associated actors. Actors who occupy positions in the social structure at the ends of bridges between cliques have enormous gatekeeping resources—they are the first to receive fresh information, for example, and can vet that information as they see fit. The wider the gap of the “structural hole” (Burt’s term for the absence of social ties between cliques), the more powerful the gatekeeping positions become. Betweenness Centrality is a measure of this type of positioning.

To think about the way in which Betweenness Centrality is calculated, imagine the flow of a piece of information or an idea from person to person within a network. For every pair of people in the network, there is a shortest path from person to person between them, called a “geodesic.”^{*} The nodes may be directly connected to each other, for example, or they may have one other person who knows them both who is the intermediate step between them if they do not know each other directly. (See Figure A.4.)

in A chooses everyone else. Density then becomes a marker for the presence of social patterns—high densities signal a stronger pattern that should be noted as “really” existing—low density may be merely the “noise” of social life and not indicative of patterned action. There is always a question in network analysis of “cut-off” values—when is density high enough to indicate a strong and stable pattern that should be examined? When is density low enough to be treated as the absence of a tie between groups? There are no set rules about this. I have included the densities both within and between groups in the analysis of Chapter 4 so that my decisions about cut-of values can be seen.

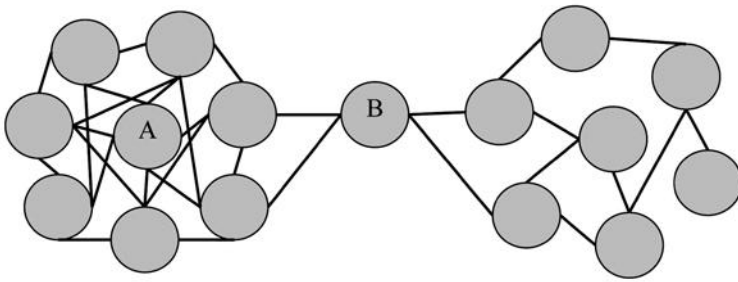


Figure A.3 Centrality

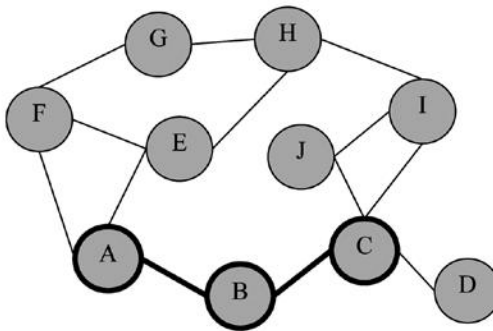


Figure A.4 Geodesic

Note: The shortest path between A and C is through B, not through E, F, G, H, I, and J.

The path of intermediaries may be quite long if the pair is widely separated in a sparse network. For every network, there is a web of geodesics that is the picture of all of the shortest paths between all of the possible pairs of nodes in the network. For each node, the Betweenness Centrality score is a measure of the number of geodesics that pass through that node. This is a measure of the power that the node has to control the flow of information (or at least to be included in the dissemination of the information early on.) Look again at Figure A.3. Note that while Actor A had great Degree Centrality compared to Actor B, Actor B has great Betweenness Centrality compared to Actor A. Both are central actors in different ways and both positions have their own strengths and weaknesses. Actor A may be highly esteemed within one segment of the art world, while Actor B may be less esteemed in any one segment, but may have cachet that crosses clique boundaries.

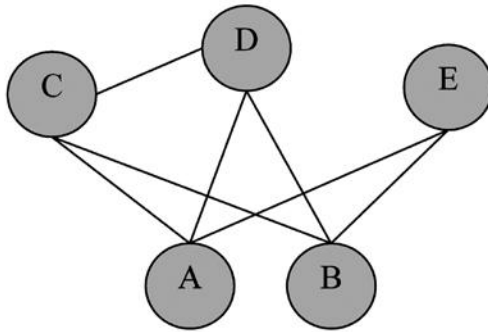


Figure A.5 Sociogram of Structurally Equivalent Nodes

Structural Equivalence

But how do we move from a picture of individuals making choices and being chosen to a picture of groups of individuals having structural positions in relation to other groups? For this study, one important attribute of actors in the network that emerges from the choices that they make is their membership in “structurally equivalent”² blocks. Like centrality, structural equivalence is concerned with an actor’s position within the network, that is, with the actor’s pattern of relations with others in the population. Actors are structurally equivalent if they have the same ties to the same others. Figure A.5 shows two structurally equivalent nodes, A and B, both of whom are tied to C, D, and E. Table A.3 is the matrix translation of the sociogram presented in Figure A.5.

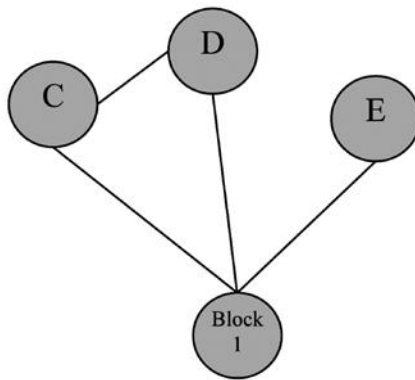
Note that the rows and columns for nodes A and B are exactly alike. The two nodes fill the equivalent positions in the structure of the network. We could reduce the sociogram in Figure A.5 by collapsing the nodes for A and B into one node as in Figure A.6. We will call that node Block 1 and note that Block 1 has two members: A and B.

Collapsing the nodes in such a small network seems trivial, but once the networks become reasonably large, reducing the actors into structurally equivalent blocks allows us to picture the social structure of the network more analytically than would the massive, unordered sociogram. Because the structurally equivalent actors share the same patterns of ties, we do not lose information about the shape of the total network. Instead we gain information about the individual actors involved—specifically, the actors acquire a categorical attribute, block membership. That is, we know which actors in the network share the same pattern of ties.² They are a structural group.

2 This is always “more or less” when working with real world data where few actors have exactly the same ties with exactly the same others. Network analysts choose, when

Table A.3 Matrix of Structurally Equivalent Nodes

	A	B	C	D	E
A	0	0	1	1	1
B	0	0	1	1	1
C	1	1	0	1	0
D	1	1	1	0	0
E	1	1	0	0	0

**Figure A.6** Collapsed Sociogram

Note: Block 1 members are A and B.

We can also use structural equivalence to give us insights into the attitudes and actions of the artists. The idea behind this is that people who inhabit similar positions in the social structure often have similar opportunities or constraints on their actions. This will perhaps lead them to do (and not do) certain things. It will also perhaps lead them to believe (or not believe) certain things. People in positions of power, for example, may believe that the status quo is good and will work towards maintaining it. Their structural resources may make it likely that they will succeed in their program. People in subordinate positions, on the other hand, may believe differently and act to change the status quo. But their position may make it less likely that they will be successful in their program. As Granovetter (1973) argues, for example, the Urban Villagers of Gans' (1962) classic study were unable to prevent the destruction of their neighborhood because their internal organization failed to cross important bridges to the city government. In the art world on Rarotonga, the subordinate network position of the Old Guard

partitioning their networks into structurally equivalent blocks, the degree of fineness with which they wish to distinguish positions.

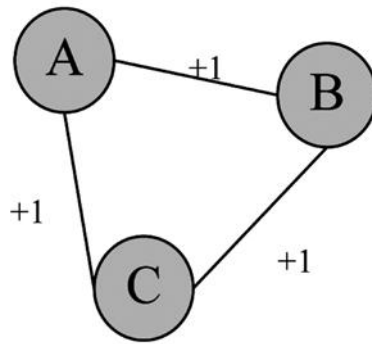


Figure A.7 **Balanced Triad**

as seen in Figure A.1 could contribute towards feelings of rancor towards the Stars, but their lack of internal cohesion might mean that their feelings are wasted in inchoate grumblings rather than the somewhat more coordinated and effective program of action put forward by the Stars.

Network Position and Innovation: Balanced Triads

“Any friend of yours is a friend of mine.” Why? For balance.

The simplest networks have two nodes. Although they can interact with each other in some different ways (the tie between them can be strong or weak, for example, or it can have direction), the group becomes much more interactionally complex—and interesting—when a third node is added. The triad,* the group of three nodes, is the basis for the analysis of innovation as it relates to network position.

Triads can be “balanced” or “unbalanced.” Imagine a group of three friends—Aketa, Betty, and Cara. Imagine that Aketa and Betty are very good friends. Now imagine that Aketa also likes Cara. In order for the triad to be balanced, Betty will also need to like Cara, as in “any friend of yours is a friend of mine.” The triad will be able to function smoothly and harmoniously if all the members have positive ties to each other. This is the simplest form of balance. This can be represented in a sociogram (see Figure A.7) where feelings of positive emotion are marked with a +1 and feelings of negative emotion are marked with a -1. (We can easily calculate when a triad is balanced, by multiplying the signs of the ties around the triad. So in this example +1 times +1 times +1 equals +1. A positive outcome means a balanced triad.)

Now imagine that instead of liking her, Aketa loathes Cara. This is represented in Figure A.8. In order for the triad to be balanced, Betty, too must have—or must develop—negative feelings towards Cara. (+1 times -1 times -1 equals +1. Again,

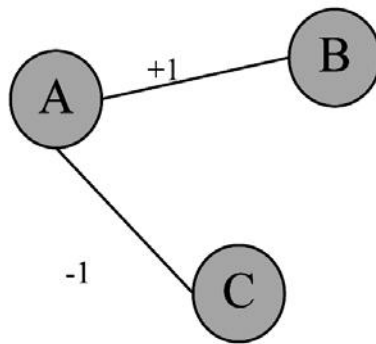


Figure A.8 Balance Resolutions 1

a positive outcome means a balanced triad.) Suppose that instead Betty had strong positive feelings for Cara. She would soon be in the difficult social situation of having two friends who loathe each other. She would be forced to socialize with them separately and would have serious conflicts to handle whenever that became impossible—whom, for instance, should she invite to her birthday party? Whose side should she take when presented with squabbles between the two enemies? Even providing a shoulder to cry on to one of the friends would in all likelihood lead to the alienation of the other. In fact, unbalanced triads such as this one (+1 times -1 times +1 equals -1) are unstable and tend to resolve over time into balanced triads. There are a few different ways in which this could happen. Betty could drop her friendship with Aketa or with Cara, thus transforming the triad as shown in the examples in Figure A.9. Or Aketa and Cara could resolve their differences and create a positive bond so that the triad looks like the original triad in Figure A.7. Unless the bonds between the actors are so weak that they are functionally unimportant, the unstable, unbalanced triad will most likely eventually resolve itself in one of these ways.

Balance Leads to Clique Building

Imagine now that Aketa and Betty had remained friends and that Betty had dropped her friendship with Cara. And suppose Cara has a friend, Doreen with whom she is quite close. Doreen, for the same reasons of balance that motivated Betty to drop Cara, will need to have negative feelings towards Betty, the one who, after all, behaved so badly towards her friend, Cara. And suppose Aketa has a friend, Enere, with whom she is close. For the same reasons of balance, Betty will need to like Enere. Look at the sociogram in Figure A.10—there are four triads (Aketa-Betty-Enere, Aketa-Betty-Cara, Cara-Doreen-Betty, and Cara-Doreen-Fiona). All of them are balanced.

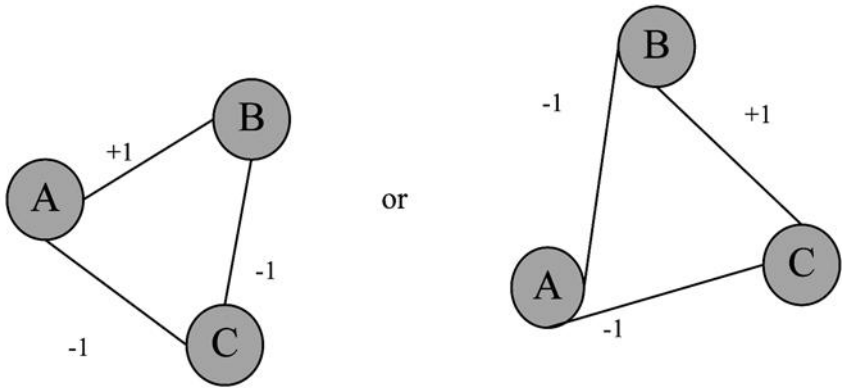


Figure A.9 Balance Solutions 2 and 3

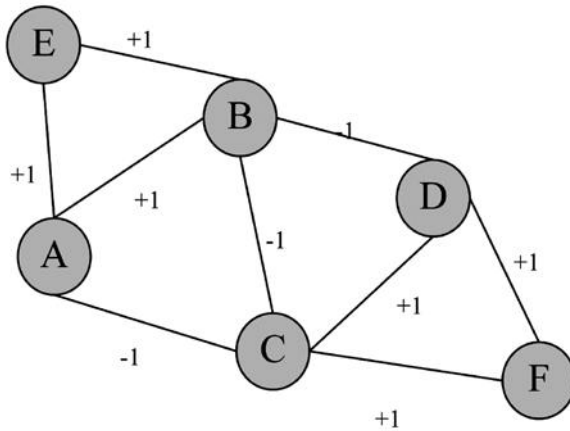


Figure A.10 Balanced Triads

Aketa-Betty-Cara and Cara-Doreen-Betty are balanced by having two friends both dislike a third person. Aketa-Betty-Enere and Cara-Doreen-Fiona are balanced by having three friends form a harmonious clique. This clique building could continue indefinitely. Enere and Doreen, for example, must have a negative tie in order for the Enere-Betty-Doreen triad to be balanced. Likewise Aketa and Fiona must have a negative tie to balance the Aketa-Cara-Fiona triad. If a new person, Gali, is befriended by Aketa, Enere will befriend her, too, and so on (See Figure A.11.) The principle of the need for balanced triads will work to create pockets of positive ties separated from each other by gulfs of negative ties. In the absence of some outside force keeping those negative ties in operation (such as being trapped together in the workplace or in Jean-Paul Sartre's boat to hell—or, perhaps, on a small Pacific island), the negative ties will eventually evaporate as the parties involved in those

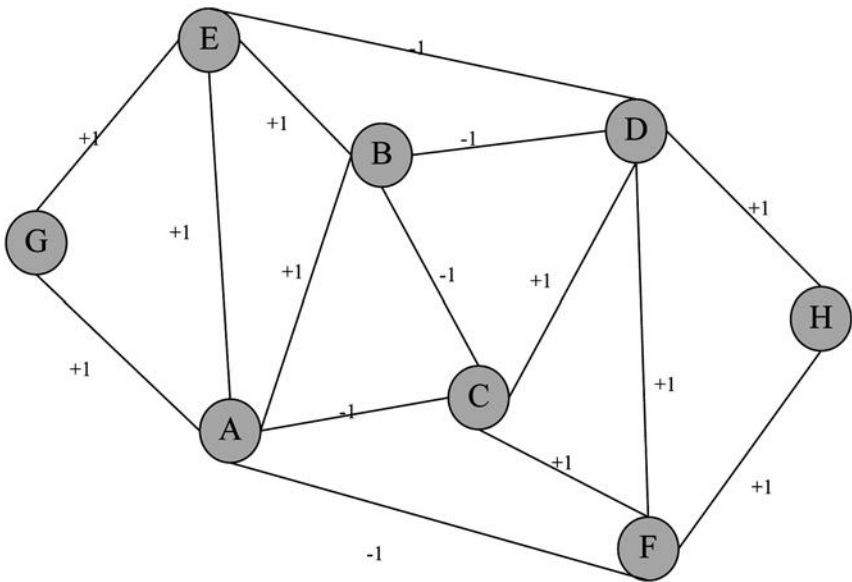


Figure A.11 Clique Building

negative relationships endeavor to decrease the amount of contact that they have with each other.

The social structure that we are left with from the theory of balanced triads looks like Figure A.12—small worlds of largely positive associations linked tenuously together by weak ties across the gaps between them. This theoretical picture matches very nicely the empirical information that sociologists have gathered about the shape of the real world (see especially Travers and Milgram [1969], Granovetter [1973], Howell [1969], and Burt [1992]). Within the small worlds, two important processes for understanding innovation are taking place. The first is a lack of ideas from and information about the world outside. The second is pressure to conform ideologically to what others are thinking.

In *Getting a Job* (1974), Granovetter uses data that he collected about job searchers to show that those who were able to access the fresh information provided by weak ties to *other social cliques* were more successful in their job hunts than were those who could not break out of their own small world. Without knowledge of the workings of other groups besides one's own, it is much more difficult to achieve success. Perhaps most importantly for a study of the role of network ties in the pursuit of deviance, Howell (1969) demonstrates this point with her brilliant study of women trying to get abortions in the pre-legalized era in the United States. She found that those women who were successful at securing the information they needed under the constraints that they faced (the need for

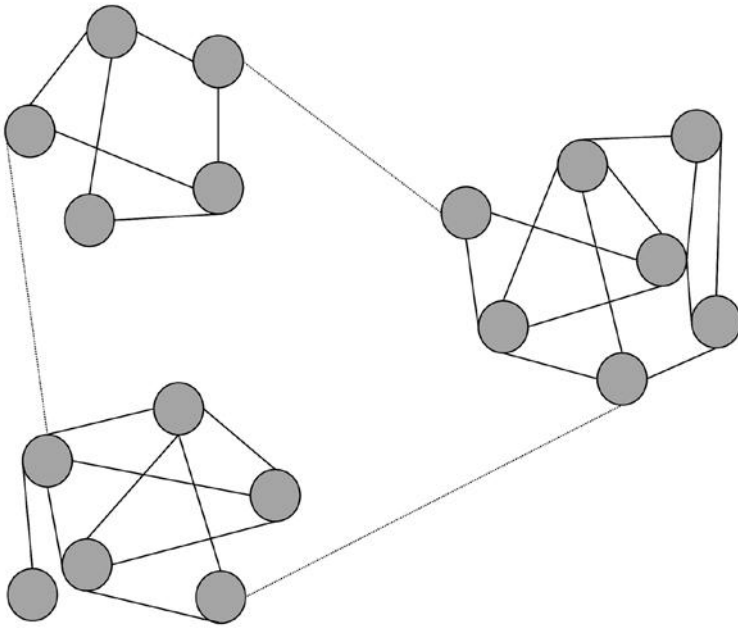


Figure A.12 Small Worlds

secrecy, the need for safety, the time limit, and so on) were those who were able to step outside of their small local clique and access the fresh information provided through a bridge tie to another clique. Their deviant (in this case not only socially non-normative, but also actually illegal) actions were facilitated by their ability to leave the confines of their own limited social network and access the resources available to them from other worlds.

Howell's study is especially interesting because it leads towards the idea that those at the margin could deviate not only in their actions, but also in their attitudes. Remember that balance theory leads us to argue that "unbalanced" dispositions within triads (and, by extension, larger cliques) lead to unstable social structures that, if they do not eventually break down, will lead to great cognitive dissonance for the members of the group. Creative innovation is by its very nature ideologically deviant. Those well integrated into the heart of a clique may find the social costs of deviance—no matter how informal the sanctions—too great to be overcome. Actors situated on the margins of social groups, especially when they already have a connection (bridge tie) to another clique, have both the resources (information) and the freedom from social constraints to innovate. Innovators on the margins of social cliques have less all-enveloping pressure to conform because they are part of fewer triads, which in turn means that they have less to lose by social ostracism. As DiNora notes (1995, 71, *emphasis added*) in her fascinating study of the creation of the idea of "genius" in the Viennese musical world, "...

because he could afford to do so socially, Beethoven took artistic risks.” A much more grim example of ideological innovation coming from the margins is provided by Allen (1965) in his study of the rise of the Nazi ideology in one German town. His detailed accounting of the rise of what was at first a very marginal idea shows the original adopters to be those citizens who were not tied in deeply to any one particular clique within the town but who instead had bridge ties that spanned the many groups that had been created by cleavages along lines of politics, religion, class, residential patterns and so on.

Although social support from a group of like-minded thinkers can be important for the development of deviant ideas, Farrell points out (2001, 291) that in his study of various historical examples of collaborative creative circles, there is a fine line between being supported and being stifled:

It may be that there is a range of diversity that is most conducive to successful circles. Too much diversity may lead to the kind of conflicts that undermined the Rye circle that included Henry James, H.G. Wells, and Joseph Conrad. Too little diversity may lead to ‘groupthink’ discussions in which members validate inferior work and develop a simplistic, sterile vision ...

The Acolytes, sitting on the margins but not isolated from the Rarotongan art world (where each group functioned to different degrees as boundary marker, scapegoat, and dominant mainstream for the others), were perfectly structurally positioned to become the leaders of *innovation* in the Rarotongan art world. That does not necessarily mean that they would be the most successful, either commercially or in terms of popularity.

Look again at Figure A.3. Actor A is much less likely to be innovative in this context than Actor B. Actor A would pay enormous social costs if she alienated the members of her clique, whereas Actor B has other social options available to her should she alienate one of the cliques. Moreover, Actor B has more potential sources of information available to her and is the only actor in this sociogram who is in a position to *begin* a fusion of ideas from the two groups. Whether that fusion would find followers within the separate cliques is another question. For dissemination of ideas, Actor A, with her high Degree Centrality, might be in a much stronger position.

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Appendix B

Glossary

Aniu: A New Zealand Maori word meaning “shameful”

Ariki: “High chief, ruler over a tribe; King.” (Buse 1995, 75)

Asymmetric tie: A social tie that goes in only one direction. An example would be unrequited love.

Balanced triad: A group of three actors whose relations with each other leave no actor in a position of conflicting loyalties. For example, two friends who dislike and are disliked by a third person would form a balanced triad. Three friends who all like each other would form a balanced triad. We can easily calculate when a triad is balanced, by multiplying the signs of the ties around the triad. So in the second example, +1 times +1 times +1 equals +1. A positive outcome means a balanced triad.

Betweenness centrality: For each node in a social network, the Betweenness Centrality score is a measure of the number of geodesics—or shortest paths between two other nodes—that pass through that node.

Bridge ties: Social ties that make connections between otherwise isolated social cliques.

CINVAS: Cook Islands National Visual Arts Society (successor to NVAA.)

Degree centrality: A measure of the number of ties that a given node has.

Density: The number of actual ties that a node in a social network has divided by the number of ties which could have been made.

Direction: The flow of content across the tie from one node to another.

Geodesic: For every pair of people in the network, the shortest path from person to person between them.

Makatea: “Raised formation of greyish-white dead coral around the coast of some islands; sometimes, as in Mangaia, extending a considerable distance inland.” (Buse 1995, 215)

Mana: “(Have) authority (legal, moral, religious) and the powers, rights and prestige which this confers.” (Buse 1995, 219)

Mataiapo: “A chiefly title and the chief who holds such title. The head of a sub-tribe, subject to the *ariki* (paramount chief) as far as the whole tribe is concerned and owing him traditional allegiance, but otherwise largely independent as head of his own family group and owning land in his own right. The title is commonly held by the eldest child, passing to the next eldest and thus down the line in that generation, passing eventually to the eldest son in the next generation, though the title is elective and unsuitable members may be passed over if the families think fit.” (Buse 1995:235)

Matrix: A translation of the information in the sociogram into a tabular form. In a square matrix, members of the social network are listed as the rows and columns of the table and the connections between the members are noted in the cells of the grid.

Moko: “Lizard (general term).” (Buse 1995, 253)

Ngati: “Clan. (A title prefixed to the name of the ancestor of a tribe or family to denote that the whole of the clan descended from him.) Buse.” (1995, 110)

Node: Members of a social network. They may be either individuals or groups.

NVAA: National Visual Arts Association (precursor to CINVAS.)

Orometua: “Preacher, missionary, priest, pastor, minister of religion.” (Buse 1995, 293)

Papaa: “White man, European.” (Buse 1995, 315)

Pareu: “Waist-wrap, kilt, dancing skirt. ... Light floral cotton material from which pareu and dresses are made.” (Buse 1995, 322) The traditional sarong-like garment of the Cook Islands, worn by both men and women.

PR: Permanent Resident.

Rangatira: “Hereditary title held by members of an *ariki* or *mata’iapo* family, now usually by the younger brothers and sisters; the head of a branch of a *rangatira* or *mata’iapo* family.” (Buse 1995, 376)

Rau: “A sign, usu. Leaves or a branch, set in place by the owner of a piece of land or water reserving it or its produce for his own or some special use; a prohibition.” (Buse 1995, 385)

Rito: “A fibre made from the young unexpanded centre leaves of the coconut.” (Buse 1995, 397)

Social network: A set of relations between actors.

Sociogram: A drawing of a social network using circles to represent the nodes (the members of the network) and lines to represent the ties (the relationship between the members.)

Structural equivalence: A situation where members of a social network are positionally indistinguishable from each other. Network members are structurally equivalent if they have the same ties to the same others.

Symmetric tie: A directionless tie, such as a kinship tie, or a tie where the content received by the nodes is equal to the content that they send out.

Tangaroa: The pan-Polynesian god of fertility, creation, and the sea. Highest in the pantheon of Cook Islands gods.

Tapa: Traditional bark cloth, made from the inner bark of the paper mulberry tree.

Tapere: “An administrative sub-district, a subdivision of an ‘oire [district, town, village].” (Buse 1995, 448)

Tapu: “Holy, sacred, taboo, under some interdict or restriction, under curfew.” (Buse 1995, 452)

Taonga: “Load, burden, gifts, anything that is carried.” (Buse 1995, 439)

Tatatau: Tattoo.

Taunga: “An expert, skilled craftsman, one with special lore or skill.” (Buse 1995, 471)

Tere: “Travelling or touring party, expedition, tour, trip.” (Buse 1995, 484)

The Polynesia Way or the Pacific Way: “‘The Pacific Way’ was used from 1970 to summarize common values, practices and sentiments in the region which differed from those of the Europeans and Asians. These include emphasis on distribution and consumption as against saving and investment; priority for extensive kinship networks; spending a high proportion of time and resources on ceremonies associated with initiation, marriage, death, accession to chiefly titles and other community events; and a lower priority for work time and output.” (Crocombe 2001, 159)

Tiare Maori: The local wild gardenia, unofficial symbol of the Cook Islands.

Tie: Relationship between members of a social network.

Tivaevae: “Patches, patchwork, patchwork quilt.” (Buse 1995, 501)

Triad: A group of three nodes (members of a social network.)

Unbalanced triad: A group of three network members whose relations with each other leave one or more of the nodes in a position of conflicting loyalties. For example, a person with two friends who dislike each other would form an unbalanced triad. Unbalanced triads such as this one are unstable and tend to resolve over time into balanced triads. We can easily calculate when a triad is unbalanced, by multiplying the signs of the ties around the triad. So in this example, +1 times +1 times -1 equals -1. A negative outcome means an unbalanced triad.

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